

#SLAMTOP50 THE ONLY PLAYER LIST THAT MATTERS



2015-16
NBA
PREVIEW



slamonline.com

LEBRON
JAMES

KEVIN
DURANT

ANTHONY
DAVIS

ANDREW
WIGGINS

BLAKE
GRIFFIN

LAMARCUS
ALDRIDGE

RUDY
GOBERT

KRIS
DUNN

HARRY
GILES

THE BLUEPRINT

STEPHEN
CURRY

GEAR
FOR GEAR



D'ANGELO RUSSELL

PREPARED FITNESS

THIS SEASON IS YOURS

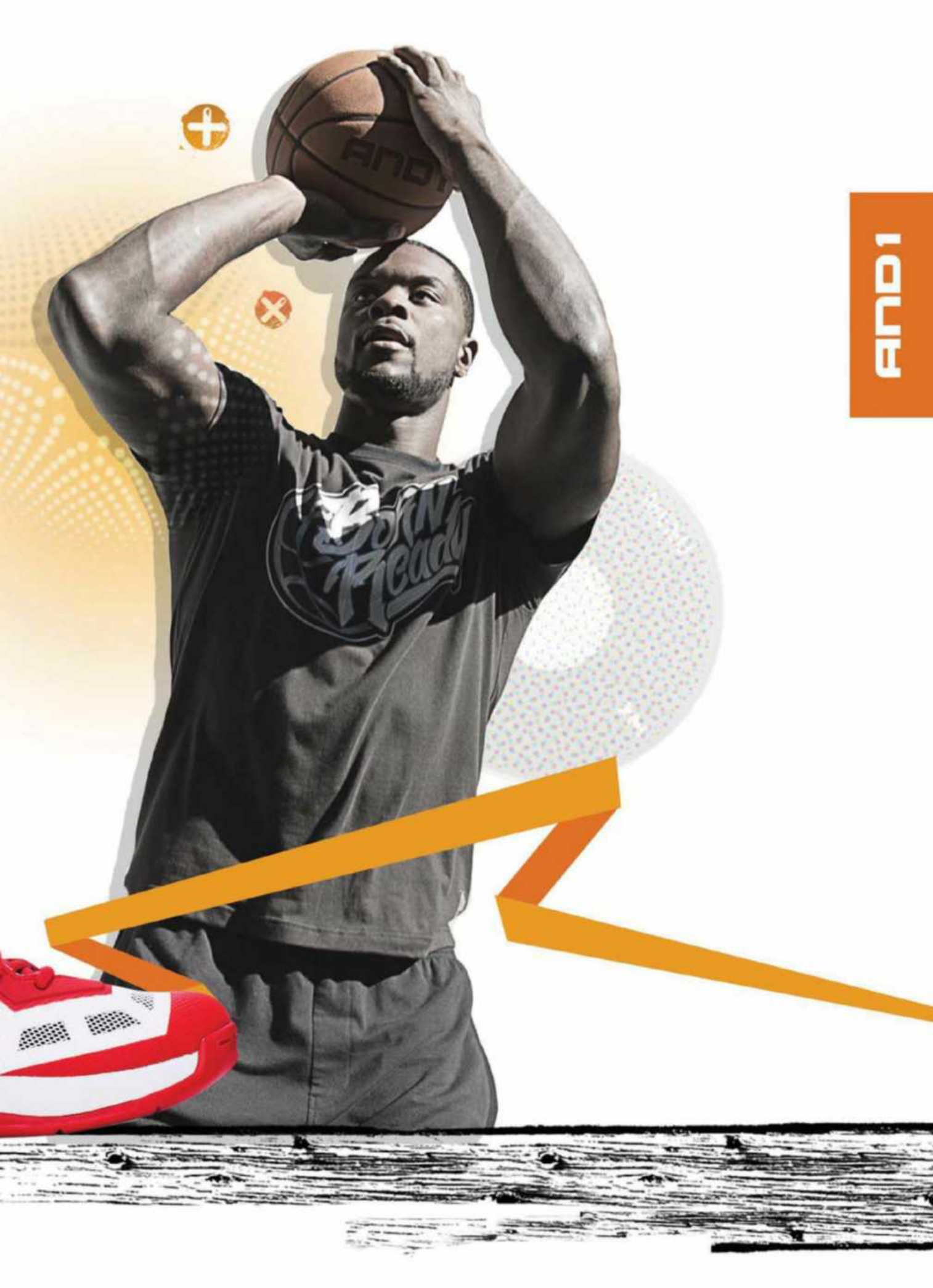


GEAR UP AT NIKE.COM/BASKETBALL

something
big is about
to drop.



AND1.COM
@AND1BASKETBALL
@AND1



AND1

IN THE PAINT

SLAM no. 1193 DECEMBER 2015

ROSTER

46. Oh My

LaMarcus Aldridge is a San Antonio Spur now. Is that even fair?

50. Tower of Power

Boasting the best combo of nickname and shot-blocking skills in the game, **Rudy Gobert** has arrived.

54. Change Locations

It's possible that the only thing keeping **Bradley Beal** from stardom is where he launches his pretty Js from.

58. What A Time To Be Alive

In case you missed the memo, it's **Stephen Curry's** world now.

68. 2015-16 NBA Preview

New year, new tact. Peep our **NBA Preview** to get ready for the season's true issues.

74. #SLAMTop50

Forget the rest—our list of the L's **greatest players** is the best.

77. Rookies Most Likely To...

There's a little less hype than last year, but we're digging this season's class of **NBA Rookies**.

78. Power Wheels

With players like Matt Scott, **wheelchair basketball** is in good hands.

82. The Sweetest Thing

Learn **Nathaniel "Sweetwater" Clifton's** story before it hits Hollywood.

PG. 68

AD may rise above everyone this year—even the reigning Champs.



Cover: Courtesy of Under Armour; Davis: Thearon W. Henderson/Getty Images



Remember to tag your sneaker pics with
#KICKSTAGRAM @FOOTLOCKER
for the chance to be featured on our
Instagram and in future issues of SLAM!



IN THE PAINT

SLAM no. 193 DECEMBER 10

FRONTCOURT

14. Trash Talk

If only you all knew how much we enjoy the letters we get. Someday we may just have to put out an entire SIP of Trash...

19. Hype

We've got skills, Michael Jordan stays helping people pay their bills, and we love to watch Cam Newton throw that pill. Plus, Kristaps Porzingis shows up on Sam's radar, Kris Dunn blows up and Dave pays homage to the late, great Moses Malone.

40. Slamadamonth

When in doubt, just log on to Getty and type "Blake Griffin."

44. Kicks On Court

Pound the rock in style.

BACKCOURT

86. The Fan

Real fans, rocking real gear.

88. Kicks Off Court

Fresh footwear for fall, pt. 2.

89. Kicks Extra

CP3's kicks can't be put in a Box.

90. Check This

We have a vested interest in this month's subject.

92. Punks

Besides the super-promising Harry Giles, we introduce you to Tyus Battle, Marques Bolden, Sabrina Ionescu and Zach Norvell Jr.

96. Frozen Moment

Everything old is new again.



PG. 92

Harry Giles is the latest star to put in time at Oak Hill Academy.



LIMITED TIME OFFER
WATCH SLING TV INSTANTLY FOR 7 DAYS FREE!

WATCH COLLEGE FOOTBALL ON ESPN WITH SLING TV

Tune in Saturday for
Live Sports & More



\$20 TAKE
A MONTH BACK
EASY ONLINE TV[®]
CANCELLATION

**ADD THE SPORTS EXTRA PACKAGE
FOR ONLY \$5 MORE**



ALL TRADEMARKS ARE THE PROPERTY OF THEIR RESPECTIVE OWNERS.

**WATCH ON YOUR TV,
TABLET, LAPTOP OR PHONE**
so you won't miss that next big TV event

START WATCHING SLING TV INSTANTLY
www.sling.com/trysling30 / or 1.888.388.3154

ROKU

AMAZON



XBOX ONE

iOS

nexus player

Watch 7 Days FREE Today!

Promotional Offers: Free trial: Available to new customers upon account activation. One per customer and cannot be combined. Must provide email address and credit card. **Billing and Cancellation:** After any promotional period your credit card will be charged monthly for applicable subscription until you cancel your service. Cancel on Sling.com or by calling 1 (888) 309-0838. Programming fees are charged monthly in advance and no credits or refunds will be issued for partial or prepaid months after cancellation. **Equipment Requirements:** Requires Internet-connected compatible device. Compatible devices include: PC or Mac, Roku, iOS 7.0 and higher, Android 4.0.3, Amazon Fire TV, Amazon Fire Stick and Google Nexus and Xbox One. **Miscellaneous:** Access on one device (1 stream) is included in the monthly programming package price (except HBO, which includes 3 streams). Certain programs may be unavailable due to programmer restrictions or blackouts. Only available within the United States. State and local taxes apply. All prices, fees, charges, packages, programming, features, functionality and offers subject to change without notice. Other restrictions may apply. See Sling.com website for details. **Offer ends 1/31/16.** ESPN and ESPN2 are registered trademarks of ESPN, Inc. ©Disney. All Rights Reserved. All trademarks are the property of their respective owners. HBO® and related channels and service marks are the property of Home Box Office, Inc. CNN, CN Cartoon Network, TBS, & TNT logos are trademarks of Turner Broadcasting System, Inc. A Time Warner Company. All Rights Reserved. ©2015 Sling TV L.L.C. All rights reserved.

THE SIXTH MAN

Not to pat myself on the back, but I take a lot of credit for the cover at your right. Not as much credit as the guy on the cover, but bear with me. Every month, when we "build" a cover, there is a combination of competition and teamwork at play. Clearly, the most important component of a good cover is the subject. You have to have the right guy at the right time, and I think we usually do. The second-most important component is the photo.

Thanks to the great individual photographers we use, as well as strong relationships with the brands we work with, our photos are usually awesome, too. The third-most important component is the cover line. We take great pride in coming up with lines that are catchy, timely and accurate. SLAM still sells a lot of copies on urban newsstands and in big-box stores like Walmart, and we believe we sell more copies when we complement the right subject and the right photo with the right line. The competitive aspect is...who is going to come up with the line we use? Publisher Dennis Page has a phenomenal track record of getting the line. Old Eds. Tony Gervino and Russ Bengtson were masters at it, and Lang Whitaker nailed a ton, too. Young bucks Adam Figman and Abe Schwadron have had a lot of wins in a short period of time. I, honestly, am not so good at it. But when we gave Stephen Curry his first cover, two years ago this month, I was the point person from start to finish: wanted him on the cover, set up and conceptualized the shoot and had the winning line. It wasn't as edgy as some of our hip-hop inspired joints, but honestly, Stephen isn't as edgy as some NBA players. His game and personality leant themselves to an innocent line like "The Can't Miss Kid." And guess what? He hasn't! The issue sold well, Stephen blew up, and now he is a World Champion, reigning MVP and firmly in our cover rotation. *Finally stops patting self on back.*

Speaking of covers, it should go without saying that they don't build themselves. It takes a masterful Creative Director to put all the pieces together in a visually pleasing way. Luckily, for more than the last decade, we had one of the best in the business, Melissa Medvedich (née Brennan), designing our covers. She moved on to a new gig halfway through this issue, and we all want to wish her the best of luck in the future. We are equally lucky to get to replace her with another design genius, long-time friend of the #SLAMfam, Paul Scirecalabrisotto, who built this month's cover beautifully. Welcome to the show, PS!

Peace,



Ben Osborne



2015 Vol.22 No.10

SLAM

GENERAL MANAGER **Dennis Page**
EDITOR-IN-CHIEF **Ben Osborne**
CREATIVE DIRECTORS **Melissa Medvedich, Paul Scirecalabrisotto**

Editorial

MANAGING EDITOR **Susan Price Thomas**
ONLINE EDITOR **Ryne Nelson**
SENIOR EDITOR **Adam Figman**
ASSOCIATE EDITOR/KICKS **Abe Schwadron**
ASSISTANT EDITOR/HIGH SCHOOLS **Franklyn Calle**
EDITORIAL ASSISTANTS **Rajah Allarey, Bill DiFilippo, Habeeba Husain, Eli Schwadron, Leo Sepkowitz, Alex Squadron, Peter Walsh, Yaron Weitzman**
CONTRIBUTING EDITORS **Ryan Jones, Tzvi Twersky**
ONLINE NEWS EDITOR **Marcel Mutoni**
BASKETBALL EVANGELIST **Rick Telander**
EDITORIAL INTERN **Max Resetar**
SENIOR WRITERS **Jake Appleman, Russ Bengtson, Michael Bradley, Alan Paul, Khalid Salaam, Bonsu Thompson, DeMarco Williams, Nima Zarrahi**
CONTRIBUTORS **Shannon Booher, Brian Boyles, Rus Bradburn, Myles Brown, Max Del Signore, Sherman Johnson, Ananth Pandian, Sam Rubenstein, D'Angelo Russell, Jayson Tatum, Duane Watson, Dave Zirin**

Art

CONTRIBUTING PHOTOGRAPHERS **Atiba Jefferson, Tom Medvedich, Geordy Pearson**

Circulation/Advertising

ASSOCIATE GENERAL MANAGER **David Schnur**
MVP **Spiro Maroulis**
ADVERTISING SALES **Michael Yaari**

Manufacturing & Production Operations

VP, MANUFACTURING & AD OPERATIONS **Greg Parnell**
SENIOR DIRECTOR, AD OPERATIONS **Pauline Atwood**



TEN: THE ENTHUSIAST NETWORK, LLC

CHAIRMAN **Peter Englehart**
CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER **Scott P. Dickey**
EVP, CHIEF FINANCIAL OFFICER **Bill Suttman**
PRESIDENT, AUTOMOTIVE **Scott Bailey**
EVP, CHIEF CREATIVE OFFICER **Alan Albanian**
EVP, SPORTS & ENTERTAINMENT **Norb Garrett**
EVP, CHIEF CONTENT OFFICER **Angus MacKenzie**
EVP, OPERATIONS **Kevin Mullan**
EVP, SALES & MARKETING **Eric Schwab**
SVP, DIGITAL OPERATIONS **Dan Bednar**
SVP, SALES OPERATIONS **Matt Boice**
SVP, FINANCIAL PLANNING **Mike Cummings**
SVP, AUTOMOTIVE DIGITAL **Geoff DeFrance**
VP, EDITORIAL OPERATIONS **Amy Diamond**
SVP, CONTENT STRATEGY, AUTOMOTIVE **David Freiburger**
SVP, DIGITAL, SPORTS & ENTERTAINMENT **Greg Morrow**
VP, DIGITAL MONETIZATION **Elisabeth Murray**
SVP, MARKETING **Ryan Payne**
EVP, MIND OVER EYE **Bill Wadsworth**

CONSUMER MARKETING, ENTHUSIAST MEDIA SUBSCRIPTION COMPANY, INC.

SVP, CIRCULATION **Tom Slater**
VP, RETENTION & OPERATIONS FULFILLMENT
Donald T. Robinson III

Editorial & Advertising Offices

261 Madison Avenue, 6th floor, New York, NY 10016
p.212.915.4000

WRITE TO SLAM: trashtalk@enthusiastnetwork.com
To carry slam in your store: 800.381.1288

Subscriber Customer Service

FOR US: slam@emailcustomerservice.com or 800.333.6411
INTERNATIONAL: 386.447.6383 or write to SLAM, P.O. Box 420235, Palm Coast, FL 32142-0235. Please include name, address and phone number on any inquiries.

CANADA POST: Return undeliverable Canadian addresses to IMEX Global Solutions, P.O. Box 25542, London, ON N6C 6B2.

Reprints

Contact Wright's Media @ 877.652.5295 (281.419.5725 outside the US and Canada) to purchase quality custom reprints or e-prints of articles appearing in this publication.

Back Issues

To order back issues, visit <https://www.circsource.com/store/storeBackIssues.html>

Any submissions or contributions from readers shall be subject to and governed by TEN: The Enthusiast Network's User Content Submission Terms and Conditions, which are posted at <http://www.enthusiastnetwork.com/submissions/>

Occasionally our subscriber list is made available to reputable firms offering goods and services we believe would be of interest to our readers. If you prefer to be excluded, please send your current address label and a note requesting to be excluded from these promotions to TEN: The Enthusiast Network, LLC, 631 S. Douglas St., El Segundo, CA 90245, Attn: Privacy Coordinator.

PRINTED IN U.S.A.

Copyright © 2015 by TEN: The Enthusiast Network Magazines, LLC. All rights reserved.



Courtesy of SKLZ

OFF THE BENCH Alex Squadron

Basketball is in Alex Squadron's blood. Born and raised in New York, Alex has loved the game for as long as he can remember. He grew up idolizing point guards and SLAM cover stars like Allen Iverson. Alex went on to play three years of varsity basketball in high school and continues to play club at Washington University in St. Louis. Through all the ups and (mostly) downs, Alex has remained a die-hard Knicks fan. As a basketball junkie and passionate writer, SLAM has been the perfect fit for him. Alex has previously written for *Sports Illustrated*, *Bloomberg Sports* and more. Check out his pieces on SKLZ in this month's HYPE and Sneaker Box in Kicks Extra. You can follow him on Twitter @asquad510.



ARE YOU READY?

THE 2016 TOURNAMENT SEASON IS RIGHT AROUND THE CORNER—IS IT YOUR TIME IN THE SPOTLIGHT?



**LAS VEGAS
EASTER SHOWDOWN**
MARCH 24-26, 2016



**H-TOWN CLASSIC
HOUSTON**
APRIL 15-17, 2016



**LAS VEGAS
GRAND OPENING**
APRIL 15-17, 2016



**KINGWOOD CLASSIC
HOUSTON**
APRIL 22-24, 2016



**THE BIG CUP
HOUSTON**
NIKE EYBL DATE TBD



**ORLANDO SUMMER
CLASSIC**
JULY 6-10, 2016



**LAS VEGAS
LIVE**
JULY 13-17, 2016



**LAS VEGAS
CLASSIC**
JULY 20-24, 2016

BIGFOOTHOOPS.COM (713) 524-3036

NCAA PERIOD FOR COLLEGE COACHES

BIGFOOT HOOPS



HYPERDUNK '15 FLASH & DASH MEETS THE





CLASSIC FUNDAMENTAL



SHOP ALL COLORS AT [DICKS.COM](https://www.dicks.com)

EVERY SEASON STARTS AT
DICK'S
SPORTING GOODS.

TRASH TALK

SLAMONLINE.COM
@slamonline
facebook.com/SLAMMagazine
slamonline.tumblr.com
pinterest.com/slamonline
slammagazine

KING MAGAZINE

Issue 192 was poppin'. Wasn't feeling LeBron on the cover but the Paul George story was on point and the Coach K story was real feathery-like. Thank y'all for letting D'Angelo Russell do y'all diary. It's like I have to make myself like him because I felt they should have drafted Okafor. But I don't think my Lakers gon' be half bad. You got Randle back and Clarkson looking like a baby Westbrook in camp. We got Sixth Man of the Year Lou Will and Hibbert. And lastly Kobe "Bean" Bryant himself. They'll compete for a 7 or 8 seed and next summer they'll have a bankroll to spend! If you're part of Laker Nation, which I happen to be the head of, stay focused 'cause we gon be 'ight. Holla at me Uncle Ed. Tay the Gr8 // Pendleton, IN

Just got done with the Throwback Issue, and my Trash Talk is about the guy on the front cover, Kobe "Bean" Bryant. As they say, he's playing in his last days. I can't take 5 rings away from him or say he wasn't one of the greatest, but sometimes you have to give and let go. Kobe don't be ashamed that you're part of history. Sit back and let the latest SLAM cover subject, LeBron, take care of everything.
DENARIUS STALLINGS // AMERICA

So, my friends rattle on to me about how I need to write a column, and I haven't the slightest idea who to contact, but I figured I'd go out on a limb and send you

an FB post inspired by the Cavs. It was written for FB, not a column, but I wanted to share my style with you on the long-shot chance it gets your attention.

I know how bad I've wanted to have a winning team in my lifetime, but if the Cavs pull off a title, there is someone very special to me that this will affect in an amazing way... My Grandfather. At 86, he's survived a stroke/heart attack combo that placed him in a coma. We were told he'd have almost no chance of surviving, and if he did wake, he'd most likely be brain dead. But he woke, and within

**TAG YOUR PICS
#MYSLAM**



**INSTAGRAM
OF THE MONTH**
@ezch33zy 92707
Got my 2 copies!
#kingjames #1bj23
#slammagazine



months he was back to work. As time passed, multiple bouts with pneumonia in his lungs, diabetes, high blood pressure, falls and congestive heart failure took its toll...The strongest man I've ever known had to stop working. It shook him, but he keeps on fighting for my grandmother. The one thing he's never seen is a true Cleveland win. Yea he had the Browns in the NFL Championship days, but they have never made it to a Super Bowl. Just the heartbreaks and near misses of the '80s.

The Tribe came so close in '97...but blew it. The '07 Cavs went down in a heart-breaking sweep. I wondered if the day would come where, just once, a team would win for him. Enter the 2014/15 Cavs and the return of LEBRON JAMES. He had returned from leading a roster of superstars to leading an island of Misfit Toys into battle! They, like my grandfather, fought harder than imaginable, and took a 2-1 lead over the most dangerous team in the NBA,

Golden State! Between LeBron's unbeatable stats and leadership, and the little-known Matthew Dellavedova's gritty, Rugby style heart...the troops were rallied! Had they pulled it off, it would have been a story for the ages, with LeBron cemented in arguments about the GOAT, because not even the Mighty Jordan (who I hate comparing him to, but this statement is true) has ever gotten it done without a team surrounding them. My grandfather's grit is the type of grit that we, as NE Ohioans, have been raised with...LeBron James has brought that kind of greatness and grit back home, and it's magical! So my long-winded words are epitomized by this statement: Please, Cavaliers, win a title! For yourselves, for NE Ohio, for all the fans, and for Bob Altimore, laid up in Canton, OH. A man that never gives up on his life, his family, or his teams...win for him, so he can rest easy with a true title in his life's memory. Thank you, Cavs.

SHANE ALTIMORE // VIA EMAIL

You guys at SLAM do a great job keeping us up to date on all the latest sneaker news. I think the Kyrie 1 was one of the best shoes Nike has released in a long time and I am excited about the LeBron 13 that you guys debuted on your last cover. Curry is obviously doing great things for Under Armour and I expect James Harden to get his first shoe from adidas soon.

JOSHUA SMITH AKA WIGGINS // VIA EMAIL
I have a hard time believing you are known as Wiggins.—Ed.

I've been reading your mag since like 2004, and it's the only basketball magazine I'll read and follow. I am from Toronto, aka the 6, and as you know we have two of the last three year's first picks and last year's ROY.

Anyways, I personally believe SLAM was a major influence in Toronto hoops. I don't remember what issue it was, but you guys once did an article on one of our hometown hoopers, Junior Cadougan, and that had

was in SLAM Ish 93 (Dec, '05), which had LeBron on the cover. Word to Lang Whitaker.—Ed.

Let me school some of these so-called basketball fans about the 2015 finals between the Cavs and Warriors! I am not impressed AT ALL! With the warriors winning the championship! I will give you people 4 reasons why! 1: they did not have to face the Spurs in the Playoffs! 2: EVERY team the Warriors faced in the playoffs did not have its starting point guard! 3: They beat a Cavs team with 1 superstar and a bunch of role players! So basically they beat the Knicks! 4: If the warriors were so much better than the Cavs! Why didn't they SWEEP the Cavs! I will tell you why! His name is LeBron James! It took the Warriors 6 games to beat a team with a 7-man roster! So I am not impressed! We all know who the REAL MVP is!

ANTHONY COOK // BROOKLYN, NY
OK!—Ed.

The Mon Valley had stars like Clairton's Lloyd Moore, Tyus Nedd, Richard & Billy Snow (my uncles), John Marshall, McKee Sports, Freddie Lewis (St. Louis Spirits), Donnie Banks, Huey Jenkins and Harlin Kimbrow, Braddock's Jose Champagne, Petey Harris, Andre Carey & a few more!! Beaver Valley had guys like Bobby Sura, Sean Miller, Dante Calabria. Also there's other talent such as Armond "The Hammer" Gilliam to go along with Pittsburgh's DeJuan Blair, DJ Kennedy and DeAndre Kane. Also Herb Pope!! Kenny Durrett was and will always be mentioned as one of the greatest basketball players to ever come out of PGH and Western Penn! SLAM spoke extremely highly of this phenom whose career was cut short by injury but had a great career at LaSalle University in Philly and clearly dominated the Big 5 while giving everyone work! RIP Sir Kenny Durrett! You'll never be forgotten in

ever played the game. By some miracle the stars were lined up perfectly that they came into the League at exactly the same time. They sent the NBA into the stratosphere. Nothing like that will probably ever happen again. They were each other's equals. Even today it's still impossible to say who was really better. Two total selfless players who did whatever was needed to help their team win. They could dominate a game by taking 10 shots. To me, that's one of the reasons I always preferred them over Jordan and Kobe. MJ and Kobe, for the most part, needed to take a high volume of shots to dominate games. Magic and Bird would let the game come to them and get rebounds, points or assists depending upon what was needed during a particular game. LeBron plays that way today. It's a pleasure to watch. The three of them put up crazy stat lines. Take Bird, for example. He blended shooting, scoring, rebounding and passing as well as anyone who's ever played in the NBA. When you compare Bird to the other all-time greats, ask who was more adept at shooting, rebounding and passing? For my money, it's Bird. Only player in NBA history with a career statline of 24-10-6. Combine that with the fact that he was arguably the smartest and most clutch player of all-time. His game was so cerebral. When it comes to shooting, rebounding and passing and for me, Bird's other greatest basketball gift is his ability to make everyone around him better. Nobody has ever done it better than Larry Bird.

TOM ORLOWSKY // POTTSTOWN, PA
#Orlowskyneverstops.—Ed.

Thanks so much for the Throwback Issues—great job! I'm an avid KG fan and would love to see him on the cover in the near future. He is one of the greatest forwards of all time. And after signing a two-year contract with the Timberwolves, he'll join Robert Parish in League history to play for 21 seasons. So, please throw him some love. And, a prodigious shoutout to SLAM and my fiancée—for both have held me down while I complete this bid.

TENISHA HILL // GATESVILLE, TX

TWEET OF THE MONTH



LeBron James
@KingJames



Following

S/O @SLAMonline! Been riding with me since day 1. Let's get it. #NewCoverAlert
#StriveForGreatness

RETWEETS
364

FAVORITES
1,153



3:42 PM - 15 Sep 2015



everyone hyped! He did not have a great career but true hoopers still respect him and guys like Denham Brown—up here they are city legends. I work in a high school with troubled youth and I use basketball to connect with most of them, and most of the time I use SLAM to connect with them. I am definitely going to show off the November issue because I am a huge LeBron fan. I can't wait till next summer when he is on the cover again, showing off his third ring.

MILTON LUNA // VIA EMAIL

Love this, thank you! BTW, Junior

I'm corresponding with you from behind the fences of SCI Pine Grove in Indiana, PA. My origins began about 13 miles south of Pittsburgh. As a youngster, I always listened to the older brothas speaking about the talent coming from out of Pittsburgh and the surrounding areas like Mon Valley and Beaver County!! Thanks so much for the story on Kenny Durrett from the Hill District in Pittsburgh, which produced many hoops stars, such as Jeep Kelly, Maurice Lucas, Billy Knight and Larry Anderson.

Pittsburgh or anywhere else!

LONNIE D. SNOW // INDIANA, PA

P.S. I forgot to mention Henry Chatman, Bracey Lowe and Marvin Bailey (PGH's finest)!! Big ups to the Clairton Football Bears!! Hershey awaits you, let's bring the chip back to C-Town!!

MORE OLD SCHOOL

I enjoyed your Throwback Issue with the cool cover of Kobe. I also loved Michael Bradley's article about the rivalry between Magic Johnson and Larry Bird. In my opinion, Magic and Bird are as good as anybody that's



FRESH
EMPIRE
★

KEEP IT FRESH.
LIVE TOBACCO-FREE.

ARE YOU A **KING?**

Nothing rules you, especially not cigarettes.

**REJECT CIGARETTES
REGAIN CONTROL**



@FRESHEMPIRE

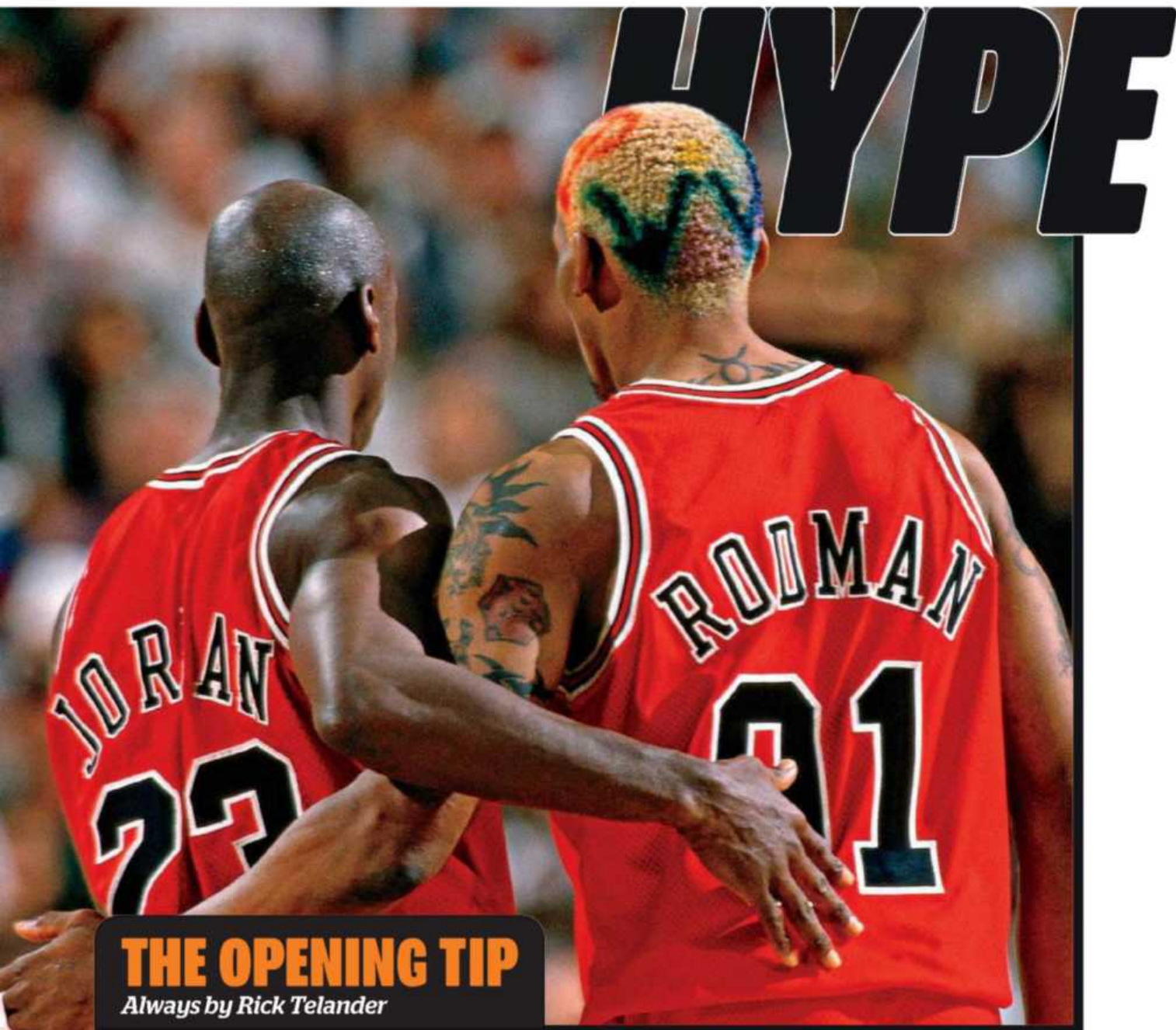




RULE THE COURT.

THE CLASSIC RETURNS APRIL 22-24, 2016

BIGFOOTHOOPS.COM **BIGFOOT**  **HOOPS** (713) 524-3036



THE OPENING TIP

Always by Rick Telander

The '95-96 Bulls were so good the only question was what would happen off the floor? That team finished with an NBA-record 72-10 regular season and then blew through the Playoffs with a 15-3 record to its fourth NBA title in six years.

Players had books coming out, they went on *Oprah* and *Saturday Night Live*; Jordan himself starred with Bugs Bunny in *Space Jam*, which opened at No. 1 and became the highest-grossing basketball movie of all time. There was incense-burning and disco parties and Jackson's

efforts at meditative mindfulness, at bringing the disparate members into a state of cohesiveness, keeping distractions at bay by allowing them to flow through their minds and away like dust in the breeze.

Some of it worked, some didn't. With a starting four of Jordan, Scottie Pippen, Ron Harper and Luc Longley, and outstanding role players like Toni Kukoc, Steve Kerr and James Edwards, all the Bulls needed was a hard-working, defensive-minded, rebounding fool at power forward to complete the sacred circle.

Enter Dennis Rodman.

At times the fool part was paramount. Rodman, known as "Worm," wore so many hair colors and had so many tattoos and piercings that he seemed like a side show escapee. He argued with refs, headbutted a foe, was tossed from game after game, and his X-rated book *Bad As I Wanna Be*, with him on the cover riding a motorcycle—nude—ridiculed NBA commissioner David Stern as being "too (bleep)ing white collar to bother with some lowlife bum like me."

Through it all, the Bulls won.

Much of it was due to Jackson and MJ keeping Rodman under control. Worm would finish as the leading rebounder in the League (14.9 per game), but, as Jackson said, Rodman had the emotional maturity—literally, Jackson felt—of a 3-year-old.

"I can't baby him," Jordan told me before the Playoffs, with irritation. "I'm not gonna grab him by the hand and lead him to the bench. I'm not gonna do that." But he would put his arm around Worm and pat his back often enough that he didn't fly off the rails entirely.

IN YOUR FACE

ANOTHER ONE

KRIS DUNN

Providence College, 6-4, G

Following a dominant 2014-15 season that saw him take home the Big East POY and Defensive POY, Providence PG Kris Dunn struck fear into the hearts of college coaches when he announced that he was returning for his redshirt junior year. Regarded as a potential Lottery pick and one of the top guard prospects alongside D'Angelo Russell and Emmanuel Mudiay, the 6-4, 220-pound Dunn's decision to come back wasn't strictly a basketball decision. "I wanted to be a good role model for my two little sisters [ages 14 and 13—Ed.],” says Dunn. "I wanted to get my degree so I can create a path for them to get their degree when they go to college."

Dunn battled shoulder injuries since stepping on campus, and last year was the first time the former McDonald's All-American was able to stay healthy all season. Under the tutelage of former Providence and NBA point guard God Shammgod, Dunn—who cites John Wall and Russell Westbrook as guys he emulates—averaged 15.6 ppg, 5.5 rpg and 7.5 apg. Learning from Shammgod, who led the Friars to the Elite Eight in '97, Dunn has elevated his game while forming a relationship with the assistant deeper than basketball.

"Shammgod, man, he's done an unbelievable job with me mentally and physically," Dunn explains. "I don't just look at him as a mentor, I look at him as a friend and brother. We have a special bond that can't be broken, and it's been great to have him on my team."

The Friars' 2014-15 season ended in disappointment when they were upset by Dayton in the second round of the Tourney. With Dunn back in a weak-on-paper Big East, Providence has one more shot to make a run.

"Last year we had a really good team, but losing in the first round was devastating," says Dunn. "We were better than that and weren't on our A-game. Hopefully this year we do better and make it past that first round.—PETER WALSH



NOYZ

Let's kick things off with a warm welcome to Micah Harrison Schnur. #SLAMisfam #SLAMfamisgrowing.....Hope no one hurts their back lugging this issue around. For real, it's like 2005 up in here!.....Maybe it's because you can't block THESE ads *wink emoji*. Nor would you want to. Good ads in a good-looking magazine like this work hand-in-hand. As we've been saying all along.....Not that we won't keep shit popping online, too. And for those who follow the business side of things, just know that we are part of

VAGUELY LITERARY

Kristaps, this column began when Phil Jackson was living in the bliss of retirement, and it began with an idea, if he's not around to recommend books to NBA players, who will? We will! Then Phil came back to Harper Lee his legacy.

Over the summer, other media outlets made their moves. *The Wall Street Journal* interviewed some people and *The New Yorker* wrote a silly version of this column to try and make people laugh. We learned that Derek Fisher, channeling Phil, offered you a kid's book called *The Positive Dog* and *The New Yorker* column offered *The Vampire Lestat* by Anne Rice with a joke about skinny Europeans. Kristaps, none of that is going to help you in your new world.

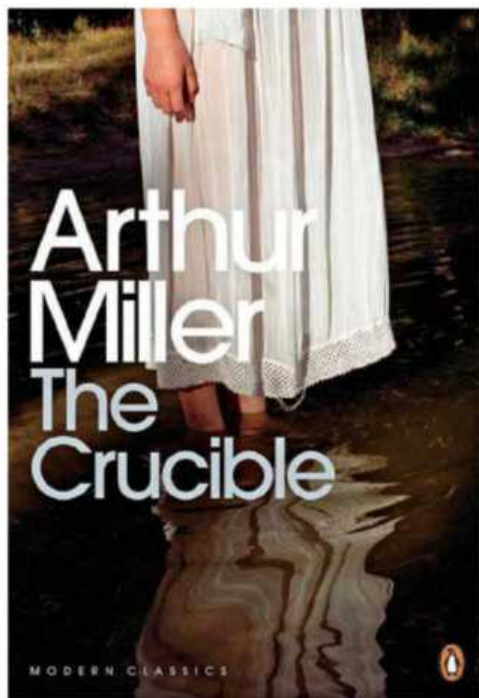
What will help you is *The Crucible* by Arthur Miller. The backstory is that Puritans left their homeland because of religious persecution and came to America. As soon as things start to go sideways, the witch hunt is on. Phil Jackson,

your benefactor, likes to think of himself as a "purist." Sounds like the puritans, the very same people who in this drama turn their peaceful world into full blown hysteria. When the Garden was Eden? Your Knicks have a lot of work to do.

There's a character in *The Crucible* who comes to town to clean up the mess, Reverend John Hale. He's a spiritual healer, much like Phil. He soon discovers the environment to be so toxic, people turn on each other to save themselves. Welcome to the NBA, Kristaps! You will soon learn that when you play for the Knicks, every three-game winning streak turns into a fitting for championship rings, and every loss is doomsday and mockery. The problem you want to avoid, is being the one they decide to blame. The people who will cover and dissect every move in your NBA career bear uncanny resemblance to our villain, Abigail Williams and her minions. Are you going to stand on your convictions like John Proctor? He is one of the great tragic heroes in all of literature.

The Crucible was written at a time when America was experiencing the Red Scare and McCarthyism. Arthur Miller wrote about a different era to make the connection, and hopefully as you read about America in the late 1600s, you don't feel history repeating itself around you. Be careful, but also stay true to who you are as you navigate this difficult time.

—SAM RUBENSTEIN



ROOKIE DIARY with D'ANGELO RUSSELL

My first...

NBA training camp was amazing. Even though it went by really fast, I took a lot from it. It was great to just be together with all my new teammates, building those relationships and figuring out how to play together. I learned a lot of little things. Mainly, though, I saw that the coaches are driven and everyone on the team is dedicated to getting better and trying to win.

Being on the same team as...

Kobe Bryant is an honor. I grew up watching him, so sharing the court with him is something else. In fact, I actually asked to have the locker next to his. I want to be able to pick his brain about the game. I know he has a lot to share, and I want to get it all while I can.

I'm sure some of y'all...

saw me take a nasty-looking fall in one of our pre-season games out in Hawaii. It looked serious on TV I'm sure, but I knew it wasn't when it happened. The tightness was the only hard part. Once I loosened up a little bit, I was able to move. I was happy it turned out only to be a bruise—I love the game too much to sit.

A lot of people say they love...

the game, but I really mean it. I don't just watch film because I have to, I watch it to get better. I also watch it for fun. If you come visit me in my crib, chances are you'll catch me watching old highlights on YouTube or NBA TV. With that said, I can't wait for the real games to start. I feel like, between film and workouts, I've been getting myself ready for this all my life. After all, I'm blessed to play the game I love at the highest level. Let the journey begin!

Line of the Month

BY SHANNON BOOHER

LYRICS OF THE MONTH: "I'm ballin', money jumpin'/Like I'm Davis from New Orleans/Or bitch I'm Harden, I don't miss nothin'/Fuck practice, this shit just happens, know y'all can't stand it;" Over the past few months, Post Malone's "White Iverson" kept building and building and building before peaking this summer with the release of an official video which simultaneously has nothing and everything to do with the song. Then James Harden—name-dropped on the track—sang along with a live performance at Kylie Jenner's 18th birthday. This thang feels like some sort of hip-hop/basketball Frankenstein, but it's undeniable.

DEFENSE IS THE BACKBONE OF THE MONTH: While news that Allen Iverson would be eligible for the Hall next year somewhat overshadowed this year's ceremony, among the inductees was AI's one-time teammate and fellow hip-hop lyric reference legend, Dikembe Mutombo. Deke, with his 3,289 blocks, trademark finger wag, deep voice and out-sized personality gets mentioned on raps to this day.



a company that is trying to make money, which means we have to be smart with budgets, investments, etc. Many of our "competitors" out there can spend recklessly because they are just trying to attract attention and then be bought. Sometimes that works, sometimes it doesn't.....Speaking of SLAMonline, hope y'all enjoyed the latest SLAM Top 50. We all put a lot of thought into the voting, and everyone who writes a piece for it works hard on it, but even given all that, the best part of the whole thing really has little to do with us—it's the comments! Thanks to all of you who participated.....

TRUE TO THE GAME

Rollin'

Blessed with basketball genes and unrepentant determination, **Austin Rivers** has grown to be a big-time baller.

When your dad plays in the NBA, you're going to grow up surrounded by the game. Ditto for those with a father who coaches in the NBA, naturally. So if you're Austin Rivers, whose pops Doc accomplished both before his son turned 8, you're more than likely going to wind up playing ball. We spoke with the Clippers guard and Florida native about his path to the L.

SLAM: Tell us about your earliest basketball memories.

AR: I started around 6 [years old]. To be honest, it started when I watched *Space Jam* and fell in love with basketball. My parents went and got me this 5- or 6-foot *Space Jam* hoop. It was a legit-looking goal they put in the backyard. It wasn't one of those cheap-looking ones. They nailed it to the ground and everything. I would go there every day and pretend I was Michael Jordan and Tracy McGrady. I would have warmups and layup lines by myself and pretend like it was an actual game on TV. And then I graduated from that goal to a real goal, eventually.

SLAM: What did your dad teach you about the sport?

AR: Commitment to the game. Watching him invest so much into the game, I started to pick up on all those habits, to the point where when I was in middle school, I was working harder than your average middle-school kid.

SLAM: Where'd you evolve into a real hooper?

AR: My AAU coach would take me to the Smith Center. It's in a rough neighborhood in Orlando. He used to take me there every weekend. That's where I played all the older kids. I would get my ass kicked every single time, but I'd keep coming back. I'd go at 8 a.m. and work with my coach for an hour and then all the guys would come. Eventually I started

getting better and better to the point where, by ninth grade, I was the best player there.

SLAM: Do you have memories of meeting NBA players when you were a kid?

AR: I gotta be honest with you: I really did not hang around NBA players. I knew Paul [Pierce]. It's crazy now that I'm on the same team as Paul. When Paul was a rookie with the Celtics, I was 5. Just think about that. And then I hung around him at 14-15 years old as my pops was coaching him. I came to a couple practices or games just to say what's up to him. He's still in the League, 18 years in, which is incredible.

SLAM: Do you remember the first basketball you owned?

AR: Yeah, it was a tiny little ball. It was the *Space Jam* ball with Bugs Bunny on it, red with white lines. That was my ball. The thing I used to drive my mom crazy with was, when I was young, I'd grab a hanger and make it into a circle and close it at the top of the door, make it into a hoop. Me and my friends would have dunk contests and play games on the hanger knowing damn well I had a court outside. It used to drive my parents crazy.

SLAM: You grew up in the Orlando area. Were you a Magic fan?

AR: I was a Magic fan when T-Mac was there. Whatever team Tracy was on, I was watching. When he went to Houston, I was a Houston fan.

SLAM: So no specific team?

AR: Nah. I always wanted my pops to do well, and then T-Mac. That's it.—**ADAM FIGMAN**

Share your photo with #TrueToTheGame #Sweeps on Twitter and Instagram for a chance to win Spalding NBA product, exciting trips and more. Visit spaldingtruetothe game.com to get in the game.



Andrew D. Bernstein/NBAE via Getty Images

NOYZ

Rookie Most Likely To... category that didn't quite make the cut: Steal Ya' Girl. Winner? Mario Hezonja!.....Just don't mess with Matt Barnes!.....The best Twitter reaction to that fiasco came from Brandon Jennings, who remains arguably the League's best Tweeter. In a related story, his (and our!) homie Kenny Anderson is the best retired Tweeter. By far.....We have so many cool ideas for a Kristaps story. We need you, Dan!.....In the outer borough, should that team change their name to the Netzzzzzzzz?.....



EVERY DAY
I BALL



With sweat comes respect. Share your photo with #TrueToTheGame
#Sweeps on Twitter or Instagram for a chance to win Spalding NBA
product, a trip to an NBA Game and more.

Visit www.spaldingtruetothethegame.com to get in the game.


SPALDING
TRUE TO THE GAME™
OFFICIAL BASKETBALL & BACKBOARD



The NBA identifications are the intellectual property of NBA Properties, Inc. ©2015 NBA Properties, Inc. All rights reserved. The Spalding® trademark is owned by Russell Brands, LLC or its affiliate. See our privacy policies. ©2015 Russell Brands, LLC. All rights reserved. NO PURCHASE NECESSARY TO ENTER OR WIN. For Official Rules, visit www.SpaldingTrueToTheGame.com. Begins 5/18/15 at 12:00 PM CT. Ends 12/31/15 at 11:59 PM CT. Open to legal residents of the 50 U.S. & DC, 18+. Eligibility & other restrictions apply. Void where prohibited. Sponsor: Russell Brands, LLC.

THROWBACK MICHAEL JORDAN

IT AIN'T TO PLAY GAMES WITH YOU

NOSTALGIA CO.
Mitchell & Ness
PHILADELPHIA, PA.

As the reigning Champs raced out to a sizzling record during the first quarter of last season, Warriors coach Steve Kerr was asked if his squad could potentially break the 72-10 regular season mark set by the Chicago Bulls in 1995-96. Kerr, a critical role player on the Bulls that season, was adamant that 72 wins will never be touched again. In Kerr's estimation, the Bulls were talented enough to win 62 games. He firmly believes Michael Jordan willed the Bulls to an additional 10 wins—explaining that Michael set a personal and team goal to shatter the 69-win record mark set by the Lakers in the '71-72 season.

"There's only one Michael," Kerr said bluntly. Always one to challenge himself from within, Michael had set new goals after returning from his baseball sabbatical. His re-entry into the League didn't go as planned; the 18 months away from the game had made him vulnerable. When the Bulls faced a stacked Orlando Magic squad in the Eastern Conference semis, we were confronted with a sequence we hadn't seen since Michael vanquished the Bad Boys. At the end of Game 1 with the Bulls up by one point, MJ was harassed by Orlando's Nick Anderson in the backcourt and had the ball picked away from behind, leading to a dunk on the other end. The Bulls had a shot to win the game with six seconds left—Michael had a free release and good look after catching the inbound pass off a timeout but instead of pulling up and shooting at the free throw line, he passed to Scottie Pippen, who he thought was stationary in the corner, but Pip figured MJ would shoot so he slashed to the bucket and MJ's pass went off his hands for the turnover. Chicago would lose Game 1 and the series in 6. The lasting image for many fans was Anderson harassing MJ into a mistake—something we had come to believe would be impossible during clutch time.



Michael spent the summer seething, plotting and banging weights with his trainer Tim Grover. He was 33 now, his muscles were bigger and even more defined—his desire insatiable. "I worked hard all summer to get into physical shape to play basketball again," he would say in a moment of nirvana. "Last year, I was mentally in the game, but physically I wasn't ready. This year, I'm ready. We have a very good possibility with this team here. We have to put it together and take a shot at it. I feel good about my game right now."

Prior to training camp that season, Bulls GM Jerry Krause pulled off one of the greatest trades in NBA history, obtaining Dennis Rodman from the San Antonio Spurs in exchange for Will Perdue. The Bulls' Big Three was born with MJ, Pip and Dennis adding an entirely new dimension.

On November 3, 1995, The Big Three played their first game together in Chicago Stadium. Michael appeared stronger than ever when he hit the floor in his crispy white 23 home edition jersey, the blood red number and logos glowing as if they were stitched together from the hands of the best seamstress in the world with each thread carefully crafted for the most artistic player we have ever seen. He wore Concord XIs on his feet.

Naturally, history chose the Charlotte Hornets as the opponent and MJ spared none of his competitors as a wave of defenders were re-introduced to that work. Michael's

points were delivered with sublime technical expertise: mid-range jumpers, back-ins, three-pointers, left handed lay ups and a two-handed breakaway dunk from the dotted line—the one the fans had waited for. Chicago won by 14—Michael dropped 42 points, 7 assists and 6 rebounds on 16-29 shooting. Craig Sager waited for Michael as he left the floor that night. It was a monumental evening and Sager was steady and focused. "People no longer assume that you're the best player—people no longer assume this is the team to beat," Sager said. "Does that motivate you?" Money smiled mischievously—a warning. "Yeah. That's motivation," MJ said. "Sometimes you need to be challenged."

Michael's performance on 11/3/95 served as the catalyst for the Bulls' 41-3 start on the way to their untouchable 72-10 regular-season finish. The Bulls averaged 105.2 points per game that year, holding opponents to 92.9—the best margin of victory of all time over the course of a season.

Michael played in all 100 games, averaging over 30 points per outing while shooting over 50 percent from the field. His incredible performances and leadership that season set the pace for the next Bulls' championship trilogy.

The 72-10 Bulls have the remnants of the most impressive individual and team accomplishments ever recorded—a true testament to Michael's sheer will and determination.

—NIMA ZARRABI

Nathaniel S. Butler/NBAE via Getty Images

NOYZ

With all due respect to our long-time writer Michael Bradley, he may not be our favorite person with that name anymore. TEN IT Desk maven Mike Bradley, come on down! Thank you for letting Ed. work again!....."We definitely are not here to replace humans.".....Shout out to apex predators.....Honestly disgusted by Matt Barnes and Derek Fisher. They should both be fined, and they should both get a life.....Much love to Bob Hurley, Shyquan Gibbs, Jagan Mosley and everyone at St. Anthony. Get that TOC chip this year!.....



STREETBALL

AND THE WINNER IS...

New York City is known as the Mecca of streetball, and though plenty of other cities can compete (or even trump) Gotham basketball from time to time, it's never a coincidence when an NYC-based team really shows out. So it should've come as no surprise that New York's DDN-Sean Bell All-Stars took home the first Ball Up Million Dollar Summer Challenge this summer, winning a cool \$500,000 in the process.

The road to the chip was far from easy. In six different cities—NYC, Philadelphia, Washington, DC, Chicago, Indianapolis and Los Angeles—eight different squads competed for a single spot as their city's champion; by coming out on top of their respective city following a seven-week season, a team earned \$50,000 (there were also prizes rewarded to winners of dunk contests and three-point contests, along with regular-season MVP, playoff MVP and defensive player of the year). Then those six city champions competed for a \$500,000 prize, all of which was documented on ESPN2 over the past month.

The DDN-Sean Bell All-Stars were loaded with talent. Former Brooklyn Nets guard Tyshawn Taylor suited up for them, and they were coached by Raheem Wiggins, a personal friend of Sean Bell, who was shot and killed by New York City police officers on his wedding day in 2006. "I'm blessed to be able to keep his name alive in a positive light every day, every week, every month," Wiggins told the *Daily News* in September. "That's something I will do for the rest of my life."

The final game featured the DDN-Sean Bell All-Stars against an L.A.-based group known as The Cheaters, who were led by former Philadelphia 76er Casper Ware Jr and coached by Casper Ware Sr. The contest aired on October 26 on ESPN2.

According to Ball Up, over 718 people competed in the summer league, with 30 percent of those individuals receiving some form of monetary compensation.

"The league's first year featured some incredible performances by America's top basketball players, and we're excited to work with ESPN to showcase these extremely talented athletes on a national scale," Ball UP CEO Demetrius Spencer said in a press release.

Be on the lookout for the next Ball Up Million Dollar Challenge, especially if you don't live in one of the cities already featured—yours could be next.—**ADAM FIGMAN**



NOYZ

Shouts to the Fever and Lynx for making it a great WNBA Finals, which is not quite over as we go to press.....ECF flameout notwithstanding, that was a nice season for the NY Liberty. We do not credit Isaiah for it at all, though. Even Isaiah's boy Bill Laimbeer could have done a bit better in our opinion. Time to give Katie Smith a shot?.....Besides Paul S, we're also happy to start working with gifted designer Todd Rodom this month. The custom NBA Preview logo is all him, and we'll be doing more fresh stuff with him soon.....

48 TEAMS. 6 CITIES. 1 NATIONAL CHAMPION.

INDIANAPOLIS, IN

LOS ANGELES, CA

WASHINGTON, DC

ballup
National Champion
Five Hundred Thousand Dollars
\$ 500,000.00
HENRIUS SPENCER, Coach

ballup
MILLION DOLLAR
NATIONAL CHAMPIONS

NEW YORK, NY

SUMMER
CHALLENGE

PHILADELPHIA, PA

CHICAGO, IL

ESPN 2



BALLUPMDSC.COM

DIME DROP

RAISE UP

Cam Newton is as comfortable throwing down a dunk as he is tossing a TD.

He's known for his skills on the gridiron, but as a youngster Cam Newton was far from a one-sport star. The Atlanta native played basketball, too, and even made the Westlake High School varsity basketball team as a freshman, mostly thanks to his Herculean-body (he was 6-5 and 225 pounds as a high school senior) and Olympic-level athleticism.

Eventually, Newton settled on football and in 2011 became the No. 1 pick in the draft. Four years later Newton has established himself as one of the best, and most dynamic, QBs in the league. Just before the 2015 NFL season kicked off, we got to chop it up with the 26-year-old Pro Bowler about his basketball career, the best ballers in the NFL and a certain bald-headed basketball legend who also calls Charlotte home. The fact that his Panthers are 4-0 as we go to press—HUGE thanks to Cam—is an added bonus.

SLAM: We heard you live in the same building as MJ.

CN: We're neighbors. He stays, as you would imagine, in the penthouse, but yes, I am relatively close with Michael Jordan.

SLAM: Got any good MJ stories?

CN: I'll tell you this: He is as

cool as advertised. It's always a surreal moment when you get to hang out with your childhood hero. I admire him, the athlete he was and the man that he is today. Any time I get the opportunity to talk to him I try to soak in as much information as I can. He's a person who has lived it, who has done it the right way, and I'm hoping that I can have half of what his career brought him.

SLAM: What's an example of him being "as cool as advertised"?

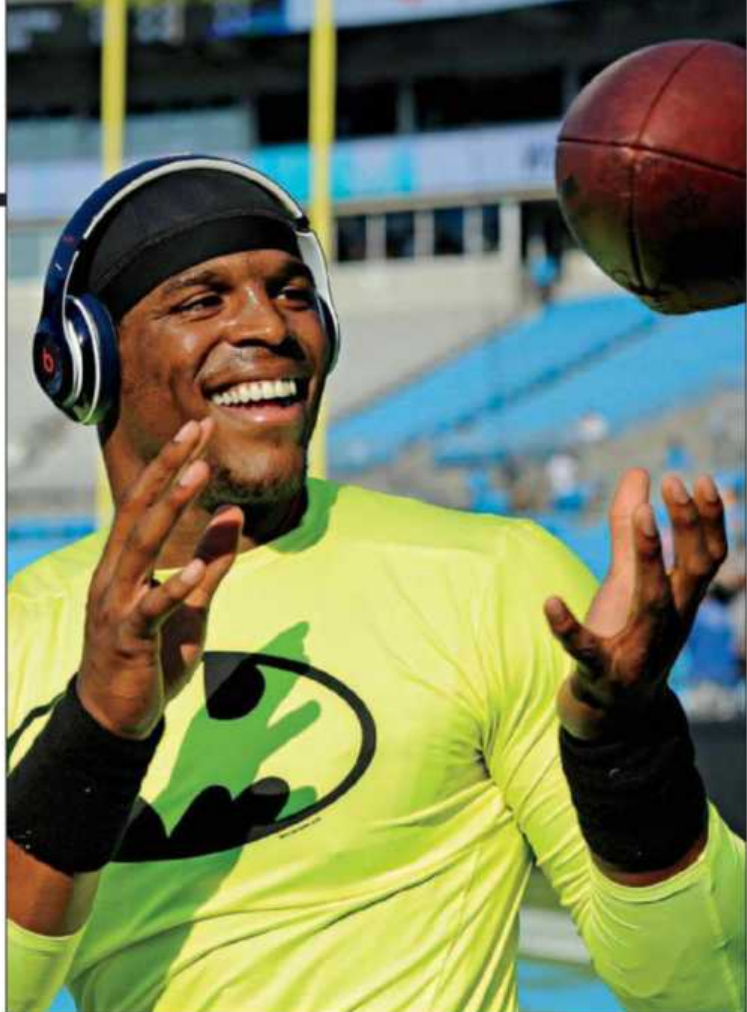
CN: The first time I met him he was at a lounge in Charlotte, and he had a bunch of family around and it was, like, very theatrical. There was smoke coming up, I couldn't really see his face, and then he said, "Hey, what's up, Cam?" I kind of stopped and was like, "Oh shit, he knows my name," you know what I'm saying? When you talk to him, he's very down to earth and that's what makes him so cool.

SLAM: You were a good basketball player growing up—who would you compare your game to?

CN: LeBron James, Kobe Bryant, Kevin Durant, you know—all the above.

SLAM: What position did you play?

CN: I was a tweener, from power forward to small forward. I was



very crafty and didn't know the differences between basketball and football. I would just bowl people over and complain when people called fouls on me. I was the irritating guy boxing out before the ball was even shot. It was fun.

SLAM: Who'd you like to watch when you were a kid?

CN: C'mon, we were all mesmerized by MJ. But honestly, when I was in middle school I really

loved watching Tracy McGrady and Vince Carter. That Dunk Contest with them was the best one I've ever witnessed.

SLAM: If you're making a starting five out of NFL players, who you going with?

CN: OK, first I go with myself—I have to be on that team. I'd also go with Jimmy Graham. You have to go with JJ Watt because what can't JJ Watt do? I also need a speedy point guard... Oh, Joe Haden is a pretty good basketball player. I guess the other player could be anyone—you could pick whoever you want and I bet we could give a couple NBA teams a run for their money.

SLAM: The Honey Badger and Patrick Peterson both say they can play.

CN: OK, well, I'll take the Honey Badger then.

SLAM: Over Peterson?

CN: Well, no, I take that back. UA family. Under Armour family, so I'll go with Peterson.

SLAM: The Brand always wins, right?

CN: Always.—YARON WEITZMAN

PICTURE ME BALLIN'

Peter Alexis, Philadelphia University: As a junior last year, Peter Alexis spent a lot of time lurking in a number of Top 10 lists. He ranked sixth in DII for double-doubles with 17 total. He ranked first in his Central Athletic Collegiate Conference in blocks (2.4 per game), second in field-goal shooting (59.9 percent) and third in rebounding (9.8). The one category he missed the Top-10 list for was scoring, with his 15.2 per earning him 11th. But with a year left in his college career, the 6-11 forward should have no problem cracking the Top 10 in the points department, too.

Courtney Nelson, California Baptist: The fact that her Lancers were unranked wouldn't stop guard Courtney Nelson from giving her all last year. She led her team to the Division II championship game, as she averaged a steady 15.4 points, 5.3 boards, 2.6 assists and 1.4 steals per game. Nelson helped knock out team after team in the 2015 Tournament, and her run earned her all-tournament honors. The dream came to a halt when the Lancers lost in the final. And note we say halt—not end—because the run can continue this year, as Nelson is just a junior.—HABEEBA HUSAIN



Newton: AP Photo/Mike McCam; Alexis: Courtesy of Philadelphia University; Nelson: CBU Sports Information; St. Martin: Courtesy of Ted St. Martin

NOYZ

The football fans among us always messed with Cam. Just a dope, dope player. Imagine if he ever had some weapons?....Speaking of a lack of offensive weapons, the "team" the Colts are surrounding another one of our favorite young QBs with is criminal. We're sure DeMarcus Cousins empathizes....Sorry, Todd Harris, but we don't care about the time change for a March game between two crappy teams! The only email we want from the NBA is the one inviting us to vote for your post-season

TIME OUT

Shot Caller

Ted St. Martin, holder of the Guinness World Record for most consecutive free throws made with 5,221, speaks about his lifetime of shot-making.

As Told to Max DeSignore

It happened on my home court in my backyard. It's a regulation goal where I did clinics. I got done giving a clinic to five students and their parents were still there. The kids wanted to see me shoot until I missed. It turned out to be a long ordeal. Some had to leave, but we had three kids and two parents there by the time we finished. That's what it was. I was getting tired physically. Mentally, I wanted to keep going. Some shots started cheating along the arc, but they still went down.

I kept telling myself I don't want to miss. The shot that I've got is so mechanical. I just kept my mind on what I was doing. I knew I was near the record. I just wanted to keep shooting. I had beaten the record once before. After that, the pressure was off. We had a man keeping

track, counting five at a time on a legal pad, and boy was it messy. It was covered top to bottom.

For a long time, I toured the country doing clinics, sport shows, halftimes of games. I was an honorary member of the Phoenix Suns. I did a lot of exhibitions for them in the 1970s. I was sponsored by various companies to do these shows. I did all kinds of events at schools, shopping centers, car dealerships... anywhere they needed me.

The technique doesn't have to change much. It may just be bending your knees just enough to coordinate the upper body. To me, the free throw is still an upper-body shot. I overcame long exhibitions because of this. Jump shots are the same. The only thing moving is your wrist and arms.

Rick Barry had a simple shot.



It was underhanded, but his philosophy was the same. He had as little movement as possible. Bill Sharman was like that, too. He was a 90-percent free-throw shooter. They both wrote forewords to the first edition of my book, *The Art of Shooting Baskets*.

I'd love the opportunity to work with NBA players. Whether it's Dwight Howard, LeBron James, any of those guys. Anyone who shoots 75 percent or lower, I'd love to work with them. I'd get them to 90 percent. It wouldn't be much. Might be a slight bend of the knees or a nice follow-through. That's all it takes. I could get them to 90 percent, guaranteed.



awards. Lang is with y'all now!.....If we die shortly after publishing this issue, it's because we saw someone had trademarked their name and we had heart failure.....How is Tinashe even allowed to exist? Talk about the potential to cause heart failure.....Can't wait to see Michele Roberts at "Ryno's".....Speaking of, you think the new 'hood has noticed our presence yet? Not many biz folks around here dress like SLAM staffers....Hillcrest Prep is ON THE COME UP for real for real.....Sorry bout the relative lack of quotes in PUNKS this month. Sometimes, kids are kids, and freelancers are freelancers....

BASKETBALL ANALYTICS

BRAND NEW, 8-WEEK ONLINE COURSE.

The **Basketball Analytics Course** is an 8-week online course with mentoring from Dean Oliver, the leading figure in the NBA for revolutionizing and modernizing player assessment. The course is for individuals who want to learn basketball statistics that measure in-game activity. Get inside the numbers with an exceptional set of statistical rules and tools used in the NBA.

WHO SHOULD TAKE THE COURSE:

- Individuals who want paid positions with basketball associations, teams, and leagues
- Individuals looking to work for third-party vendors that consult into teams
- Basketball fans who want know in depth statistical tools to evaluate players, strategies, and teamwork.



Dean Oliver

LEARN:

- Basketball player metrics
- What data is available and needed
- Using data and analytics in communicating with decision makers
- Typical analytical questions in player personnel issues
- Typical analytical questions in coaching issues



**SPORTS
MANAGEMENT
WORLDWIDE**

**503-445-7105
SMWW.com**

IN YOUR FACE

MAIN DISH

NIYA JOHNSON
Baylor University, 5-8, PG

Niya Johnson was just a freshman but could already whip passes that burned the fingertips of veteran teammates. "You better get your hands ready," Johnson recalls Baylor's coach Kim Mulkey warning the team during practice, "because you know it's coming."

"I always tell them: You're gonna get the ball," Johnson says. "I'm gonna reward you. Just look at me and I'll give it to you."

Now a senior, the 5-8 PG led the nation with 8.9 dimes a night in 2014-15, shattering the single-season Big 12 Conference and Baylor assist record with 322 in total.

The Gainesville, FL, native learned to dish from her dad. Watching Chris Paul and Rajon Rondo, the pair would dissect why the PGs made a lob or a bounce pass, or why they slowed the ball down or pushed ahead. Honing her timing and court vision, Johnson's basketball IQ would set her apart.

Johnson often breaks down the defense by utilizing a speedy crossover, charging into the key and dropping a no-look lob to a post before the help can recover. The play is rarely intercepted, as Johnson ranked second nationally in assists-to-turnover ratio (4.1).

As much as she digs kicking the ball out to others, Johnson strives to make opponents respect her jumper. After averaging 7 ppg last season, she spent the summer launching pull-ups and step-backs at each spot on the floor from mid-range to three-point land.

More important to Johnson is claiming a National Championship, as the Lady Bears last won the crown in '12. "Whatever Coach wants me to do, I'm just trying to get the job done and just help my teammates out and just try to win," she says. "Doing whatever it takes, making sacrifices, whether it's on the offensive end or the defensive end, or whether I have to guard the best player—I'm just trying to get the job done." —MIRIN FADER



Chris Jones

NOYZ

We're all gonna be working for Alexis Morgan some day.....We already thought Pat Connaughton was the most athletic rookie in the League, and that was before we saw his 90-mph fastball.....Bryce Harper getting choked by Jonathan Papelbon is like Mike Miller attacking LeBron James.....Speaking of the National Pastime, if you read this before the World Series is over, throw MLB a bone and watch a few innings so we don't have to read how "no one likes the sport anymore." It's better than football TBH. *ducks*.....

Build Ya Skillz

Training company SKLZ is helping young hoopers improve on the court.

"What can I do to improve?"

According to Laura Stein, VP of Marketing at SKLZ, that's the No. 1 question young athletes ask at the end of their season. Well, future LeBron, here's your answer.

SKLZ was founded back in 2002 to help market the Hit-Away—a simple yet effective baseball product that helped kids at home get swings in without having to be tossed a ball. For some time, SKLZ defined itself as a product company, developing training items with merely retailers in mind. That stance, however, has evolved, and SKLZ is now focused on building a brand—one with a very clear and important mission: "to prepare athletes to be ready for their sport" in every way possible.

In 2010, it partnered with EXOS (then called Athletes' Performance) to advance its brand. The coaches at EXOS train elite athletes using SKLZ products in their sessions. This allows for an

ongoing conversation about the products' performance. Thus, SKLZ's products are well tested, backed by experts, and proven to make a difference in the development of an athlete.

SKLZ re-launched their business in 2015 with the ultimate goal of becoming the No. 1 sport-training company on the planet. In its quest, it's adopted the slogan "Prepare to be ready," created 45 new products, partnered with a number of notable pro athletes (Alex Morgan, Megan Rapinoe, Evan Longoria, Tony Finau, Jason Verrett and Kenny Stills) and implemented a complex program system. These guys aren't messing around.

The company has also begun to put increasing emphasis on its growing line of basketball products. "There's a need," basketball category manager Scott Strohman explains, highlighting that level of play and athleticism have increased. The most popular



items today include the Dribble Stick, the Shotloc and the D-Man. SKLZ is constantly trying to fill needs for the athlete, which is precisely why there are both skill and performance product lines.

It offers a complete solution, not just a partial game plan.

"When [basketball players] look at how to improve their game," says Strohman, "we want them to look toward SKLZ." —ALEX SQUADRON

Courtesy of SKLZ

This issue would have been so much easier to complete if it weren't for distractions from the "Fire Safety Coordinator.".....Shouts to friend of SLAM, Steve Finamore, a Brooklyn guy doing big things out at East Lansing (MI) High—with some nice help from super-promising young star Brandon Johns. See you in Punks soon, dude.....Get off our dick, Cowherd.....Why do players even mess w/ESPN? Or The Players' Tribune, for that matter? Just come to us, fellas!.....Ice Poorten>>>ICE Content Management System. Obviously!.....For the first time in a long time, there was remnant NOYZ this month. #winning.....

★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ " #1 Ranked Event in the Country! " ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★

-Basketball Insider Report

President's Day
Tournament of Champions

adidas

HoopSource Grassroots

REGISTER TODAY!

For more information, visit
HoopSourceBasketball.com

Or call us at
(503) 512-9197

FEB 13-15, 2016
PORTLAND, OR

- Over 400 Teams Nationally
- 7U-14U Boys & Girls Divisions
- 7 Game Maximum

www.HoopSourceBasketball.com

Powered by

UNDER REVIEW

BOOKS

Barack Obama may not be the most athletic president in history—Gerald Ford played center and linebacker for the Michigan Wolverines—but he's definitely a baller. Barry "the Bomber" Obama won a state title in high school as a backup guard at Punahou before entertaining aspirations for higher office.

New York Times best-selling author Alexander Wolff takes a page out of the 44th president's book with *The Audacity of Hoop*, which examines the man and not the myth through the prism of basketball. The celebrated scribe's king-sized volume displays Obama's love for the game all the way back to the age of 10, when his father gave him a basketball as a Christmas gift. More than 125 photographs colorfully illustrate the POTUS taking fools to school on the campaign trail and in pickup games with staffers and celebrities like George Clooney and LeBron James to name a few. Sidebars reveal the evolution of the prez's game that goes far beyond Bracketology to provide a timeline of the Renegade's game. He had enough of it to impress Michelle into marrying him, but the rundown on Obama's pull within the NBA and the dawning political consciousness inside locker rooms is even more masterful than Bill Clinton playing the sax on Arsenio Hall's show. There's even an exclusive view into what has to be the world's most elegant locker room, where BO's commemorative special-edition jerseys hang.

The Audacity of Hoop is more than just a coffee-table book; it's a biographical sketch and political narrative of how the game became a touchstone of Obama's residency in the White House. —**SHERMAN JOHNSON**

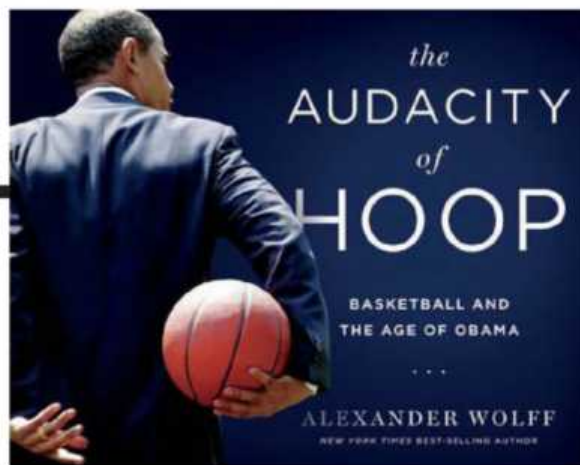
Whenever an athlete strays from the norm and doesn't offer up clichés in interviews, it gives us greater insight into who the player really is. That's what made Allen Iverson's "talkin' bout practice" rant and Ron Artest's ramblings after the Lakers won the 2010 Finals so legendary. A

player's true personality shines in moments like that, humanizing and endearing them to us.

These quotes are the basis for *Erratic Fire, Erratic Passion*, "a compendium of found poems pieced together from the post-game interviews of professional athletes." Alongside fantastic illustrations by Nathan McKee, authors Pashia Malla and Jeff Parker are able to weave quotes from Al, Artst, Kobe Bryant, Larry Bird and others into poetry. *Erratic* is an amusing and entertaining read that uses poems to paint an effective picture of each player in the book. It is a must-have for those craving a whimsy yet high-brow look at their favorite players. —**ANANTH PANDIAN**

Before George Steinbrenner became synonymous with the Yankees, he owned a basketball team in the American Basketball League: the Cleveland Pipers. The Pipers were a semipro squad in the Madmen '50s and early '60s before joining the ABL for a season from 1961-62. This particular ABL was notable for being the first to employ the three-point shot, but other innovations included a 30-second shot clock and wider free-throw lanes. The league folded after the Pipers won the title for Steinbrenner, but he immediately jumped ship in a fit of financial insolvency and precipitated a collapse.

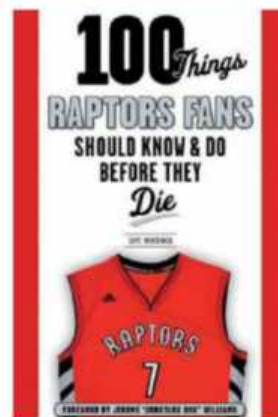
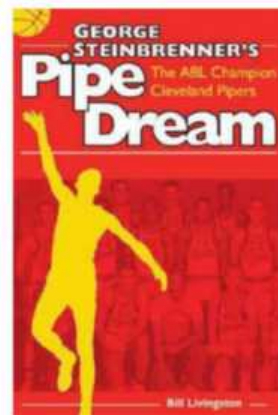
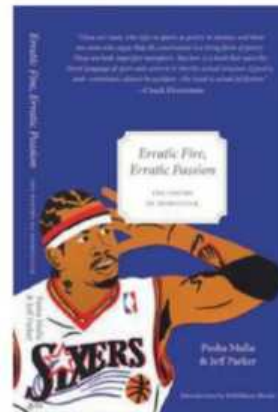
Bill Livingston pieces together a humorously grim portrait of the man in *George Steinbrenner's Pipe Dream* from interviews with some of the guinea pigs the owner misemployed. The son of a son of a shipping magnate bought the team cheap from a plumber and turned the club into a powerhouse by finessing a couple of NBA players into joining his ranks with grandiloquent visions of a palatial 12,000-seat arena. The Boss was just as irrepresible then as he was during his days as an MLB owner, trading one of his players to the visiting team at a game's halftime and firing John McClendon, the first African-American head coach of any sport. He hired the legendary Bill Sharman to win the championship in the second half of the



season, but that moment was overshadowed by Steinbrenner landing Jerry Lucas in the draft and using it as leverage in a failed defection to the NBA. Much has been written about Steinbrenner, and rightly so. He epitomizes everything an owner should and should not be. Way less had been dedicated to the ABL and their inaugural champs, until Bill Livingston entered the picture. The story about a historical chapter in sports history, when Cleveland won its first and only basketball championship, is irresistible. —**SJ**

There are some things you know about Raptors fans. They populate Canada, they booed Vince Carter and Tracy McGrady, and they like to cheer outside the Air Canada Centre just as much as inside it. Then there are some things you don't know, and that's where Dave Mendonca comes in with *100 Things Raptors Fans Should Know & Do Before They Die*. For the most part, there isn't much any Toronto loyalist isn't aware of regarding their beloved team, but Mendonca meticulously drives down memory lane, recounting the franchise's first days and each significant milestone until last year's Playoffs.

There are profiles of the top players in franchise history, along with fan favorites, and notable reminders, like "Yes He Was A Raptor" with players that have suited up in purple including Chauncey Billups, Peja Stojakovic and Hakeem Olajuwon. Mendonca doesn't shy away from some of the dark days, whether it's Kobe's 81-point outburst, terrible trades involving Hedo Turkoglu or bad GMs like Rob Babcock. It's all in there. Mendonca delivers this book the way Raptors fans approach their team: with fervor and passion. —**DUANE WATSON**



HAL PASTNER PRESENTS THE HOTTEST SUMMER IN VEGAS BASKETBALL



BIGFOOT HOOPS-THESE ARE THE TOURNAMENTS FOR THE SUMMER RECRUITING SEASON-ALL AGE DIVISIONS

Play against the nation's best: Teams such as Mac Irvin, Team Melo, Houston Hoops, Oakland Soldiers, California Supreme, FOH Seattle, International Teams, plus many more and be seen by college coaches and top recruiting services from around the country. The competition awaits...



**LAS VEGAS LIVE
JULY 13-17, 2016**



**LAS VEGAS CLASSIC
JULY 20-24, 2016**

CAN YOUR TEAM STAND THE HEAT? BIGFOOTHOOPS.COM OR (713) 524-3036



R.I.P., MOSES

Taking a moment to remember the great **Moses Malone**, who made those around him so much better, both on and off the basketball court.

“**M**oses Malone always played like an old man. Relentless, crafty, cerebral and in his way, brilliant.” These are the words of my friend Kevin McNutt, who with Moses was a DC-area All-Star in 1974. Kevin played at George Mason and Moses became the first high school player to make “the leap,” going straight to the pros to play for the ABA’s Utah Stars. Malone recently passed away at the age of 60, way too young and far too unexpectedly. But I start with Kevin’s words because it speaks to two truths about the man.

Firstly, the teenager derided as “stupid” by the media of the ‘70s because he skipped college, endured abject childhood poverty and spoke in a quiet Southern drawl, was a damn genius on the court. How else to describe someone who paved the way for the likes of Dennis Rodman and Kevin Love by turning the offensive rebound into an indispensable weapon? Someone who was able to lead the ABA and NBA in rebounds over the course of his first eight seasons as a pro...and then do it in the NBA again at age 34?

Moses was also smart enough to understand, decades before it was fashionable, that the NCAA was going to exploit his abilities while his mom remained living in a condemned home with a hole in place of a window. His labor—in such demand by college coaches around the country—demanded compensation, and he was going to receive it. As he said to Frank Deford, “Peoples could say things about me, but I didn’t pay no attention. I didn’t want to know what they was saying because I was the only one who

knew what’s true...I knew what peoples was saying and so I told the Stars, It don’t make no difference how old I am, because I still think I can bust y’all. You just watch my action.”

That “action” is the other part of Moses Malone’s legacy. We’re talking about someone who deserves to be in discussions of the best big men ever. I know everyone’s top-five is, in some order, Wilt, Russell, Kareem, Hakeem and Shaq. But maybe Moses should be in there. The man won three MVPs and retired as the fourth all-time leading scorer and fifth all-time leading rebounder in NBA history. But that doesn’t even say it all. As Jerome Solomon wrote in the *Houston Chronicle*, “Tim Duncan, who is on everyone’s short list of all-time greatest players, just finished his 18th season in the NBA. He would need to play 18 more years to match Malone’s career offensive rebound total.”

Moses’ numbers—especially in his prime like ‘81-82, when he averaged 42 minutes, 31.1 points and 14.7 rebounds per game—read like from another era, when centers like Wilt and the young Kareem were taller and more athletic than their opponents. But Moses was a lumbering 6-10. He dominated the 7-2 Kareem in the 1983 Finals when the 76ers won it all. (If Philly has a lick of sense, it will finally retire his number.)

And yet despite the statistical mightiness, that’s not the most important part of Moses Malone’s legacy. He helped train Olajuwon in the art of playing the pivot, and that wasn’t even the most impressive thing—he also gave his time to mentor people off the court.



Charles Barkley gave one of the eulogies at Moses’ funeral held in Lakewood Church in Houston, formally The Summit basketball arena, where Moses created so many memories.

“Every time I saw him, I called him ‘Dad,’ I gave him a big hug, and I told him how I appreciated and respected what he did for me,” Barkley said. “I never understood why a guy that great—because at that time, he was obviously on the downside of his career; he’d accomplished everything—I

never understood why he took a little kid from Alabama under his wing. At the time, it was a struggle, but man, I cannot believe how lucky I am to, No. 1, have a father figure not only on my team but also living in my same building, staying on me consistently [to make sure] that I didn’t do anything, to keep me moving forward. And I always thanked him for that.”

We should also be thankful: that we were able to share an era with Moses Malone, as well as those he made better.



Finish Line



CONFIDENCE IS WHAT DEFINES US

It's why we stand by our decision when we're in the moment. And why at the end of the day, we're sure we made the right one. Through style and culture, Finish Line & Under Armour bring you the best apparel and footwear so you can be you.

#TIGHTFORTOMORROW



**JERIAN
GRANT**

New York Knicks

With a revamped roster for 2015-2016, Grant could play a big role for the Knicks right away. Which is why he's been at every single "optional" team workout this summer. And why he's not backing off the goals he set before he was even on an NBA roster.



“My personal goal is definitely still Rookie of the Year.”

GREIVIS VASQUEZ

Milwaukee Bucks

“I don’t want them to give me anything. I want to earn every dollar that I make.”

“This year is so important for me. My goal is to establish myself on one team that can really give me an opportunity to display my game,” Vasquez says. “The good thing about it is, I’ve been traded [four times], but I’ve still played heavy minutes - everywhere I go, I have an impact, I have an important role, and I’m realistic with what I can do.”



Finish Line





DELON WRIGHT

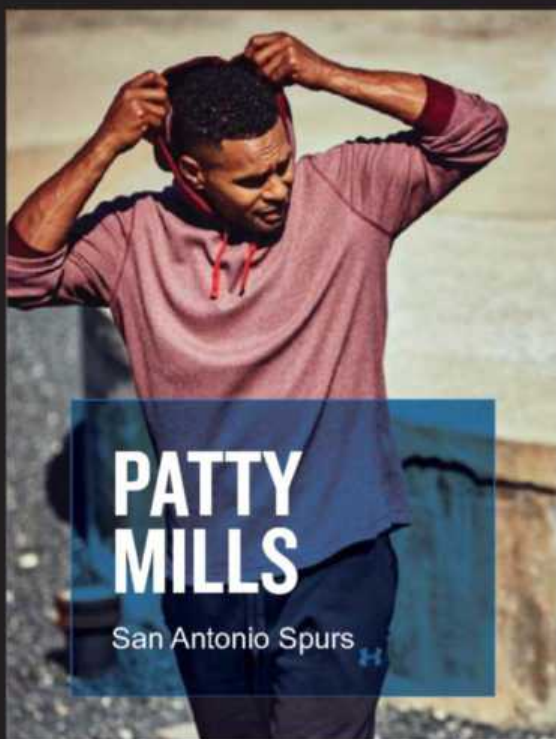
Toronto Raptors

"The middle of my junior year, going into Pac-12 play, that's when I felt I could get drafted, and potentially first round," Wright remembers. "But I still had things to prove to scouts, they wanted to see more from me. I was someone that just came onto the radar and they didn't know anything about me. That's why I had to come back for my senior year and kill it during the summer, kill it during the season and take us to the tournament."

“That’s when I
knew I’d be a first
round pick.”

Finish Line





**“Once you win,
it’s all you
think about.”**



“You dial in a lot more, knowing all that you went through. All these injuries, you’re in this gray area, hanging out trying to get on a team,” he says. “Once you win, that’s all you think about - all the adversity that you went through. It was unbelievable, winning a championship with the guys I won it with, it was absolutely perfect.”





Jeff Vinnick/NBAE via Getty Images



SLAM ADAMONTH

10.01.15
ROGERS ARENA
Vancouver, Canada

BLAKE GRIFFIN
ON TERRENCE ROSS

There are currently just 10 NBA Slam Dunk champions playing in the NBA, spread out over a nearly 20-year span of contests, from 2015 winner Zach LaVine to 1997 winner Kobe Bryant. So when two meet in a game, it's pretty

unusual—almost as rare as MVPs facing off (there are only eight of those). One would think, perhaps, there is a degree of camaraderie among them—perhaps even deference on one's part when the other attacks the basket.

Or, not. Maybe there was supposed to be and Blake forgot. It was a long offseason after all, with the Clippers' unfortunate Playoff ousting, the emoji-fueled DeAndre Jordan fiasco, the occupation of DJ's Houston home. Not

to mention his undoubtedly stressful day job as Senior Editor of The Players' Tribune. Seeing the basket and holding the ball, BG was faced with a familiar problem that had an all-too-simple solution: dunk. Anyone in the

way, well, that was their problem.

And honestly Terrence, we say just let it go. Don't try to get him back or anything. Because, well, you saw what he did to the shot clock in pregame warmups, right? —**RUSS BENGTSON**

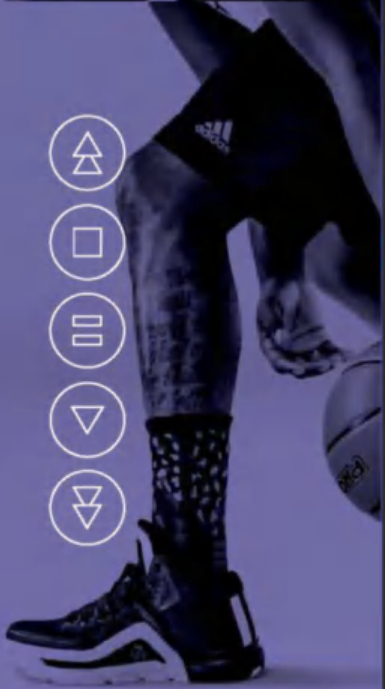


GREAT WALL

919

RALEIGH

FIVE DEEP



HIDE

NEVER

FLASHY ON AND OFF THE COURT.
J WALL IS ALWAYS IN THE SPOTLIGHT.



CREATE YOUR STORY IN THE **J WALL 2** AT ADIDASBASKETBALL.COM

KICKS ON COURT

ROCK WITH IT

How to pound
the pavement.

Image **Tom Medvedich**



Clockwise from bottom left:
Under Armour Curry Two "Iron
Sharpens Iron" makeup; Out now, \$130
Nike LeBron 13 Out now, \$200
adidas D Rose 6 Out now, \$140
AND1 Phantom Out now, \$85
Jordan CP3.IX November 1, \$130



MY

LAMARCUS ALDRIDGE

SPENT NINE SEASONS IN PORTLAND
ESTABLISHING HIMSELF AS AN ALL-WORLD 4.
NOW HE'S BRINGING HIS DOMINANT
OLD-SCHOOL GAME BACK TO
TEXAS. AND YOU THOUGHT THE
SPURS WERE SCARY BEFORE?

BY LEO SEPKOWITZ

Picture Kobe Bryant in a Knicks uni. Doesn't look that bad, right? A little strange, maybe—we've only ever seen him in purple and gold—and it'd take some getting used to. But we'd get there. Now picture him in a (defunct) Bobcats jersey—orange and blue, just the same. Looks awful, I know.

The only way to explain that difference is to say that more goes into how a player looks in a jersey than just how he looks. It's not New York's colors that would work for Kobe; it's all the other stuff. It's the big city, the big fan base, the big arena, the big brand. He'd eventually look just fine as a Knick, because when a player fits with a team,

the jersey fits, too.

It's what's so strange about LaMarcus Aldridge joining the Spurs. He spent nearly a decade playing for the rival Blazers, but now that he's in San Antonio, it feels like he's been there the whole time.

Aldridge, who at 30 inked a four-year, \$80 million deal with San Antonio in July, was born a few hours north of his new residence, in Dallas. (His two young sons have grown up there, too.) He battled for respect on neighborhood playgrounds. He attended his local high school, Seagoville. He spent two years at the University of Texas.

But it's not just his Texan roots that make Aldridge feel

like a born Spur. He's a "supremely underrated defender," a "great passer" and "a little-things guy, which is unusual for a superstar," according to his old teammates, Robin Lopez and Jamal Crawford. He's durable, having long hovered around 35 minutes nightly without ever missing 20 games in a season. He spent nine years humbly carrying the Blazers—a role previously filled by Bill Walton and Clyde Drexler and Rasheed Wallace. (Only Drexler has scored more points in the franchise's history than Aldridge; no Blazer has collected more rebounds.) Aldridge's offensive game is just like the Spurs themselves:

sharp, dependable, dominant.

Nobody who played as much as Aldridge scored a higher percentage of his points from midrange last season. Aldridge is especially lethal off the left elbow, where his jumper is unpretentious and sure, catapulted safely from high above his 6-11 frame. From deep along the baseline, Aldridge will square up, back down and fade away. Last season, he nearly tripled his (modest) career three-point total.

In a League full of 6-10 snipers afraid





"I DIDN'T GO OUT OF STATE FOR BALL
'CAUSE I FELT LIKE **TEXAS**
HAD WHAT I NEEDED
—A GOOD SUPPORT SYSTEM."

of the paint, Aldridge's arsenal is whole, his production is automatic. Flip on an old Blazers game and watch LA score 8 points in the first quarter, 5 in the second, then 8, then 6—an inevitable, tremendous 27, all told. (Though that might be cause for self-criticism. "He'll have 25 and 10 and then say, 'Yeah, but I played like trash.' That's how high his standards are," says Crawford.)

It's a fading style—the deliberate pace, the consistency, the fundamentals, even. Some parts KG, some parts Sheed, Aldridge will insist, and, yeah, those elements are most definitely there. But Aldridge has chiefly brought to mind one specific dude ever since he took off in Portland—a certain plaid-wearing five-time champion who has perfected the art of meticulous domination. Now that Aldridge has followed his hoops doppelgänger to San Antonio, comparing the two is irresistible. The narrative here is crystal clear—the Texas kid following the Texas legend, No. 12 mirroring No. 21, the student in his prime leading the teacher out the door, the dawn of a new

age, and so on.

So here it is:

"Nobody can be Tim Duncan," says Aldridge. "He's one of one, so they're not bringing me in to be him."

Oh—right—forgot about that. Aldridge is not in San Antonio to be the next Duncan (not yet, anyway); he's there to be *next* to Duncan.

Take cover.

The state of Texas is where LaMarcus Aldridge got good.

"In sixth, seventh grade, I was like a point-forward," Aldridge recalls to SLAM. He's in Las Vegas for a three-day USA Basketball minicamp. Here, his Spurs debut carries little drama—34 of America's top players are walking slowly through practice, and Aldridge will skip the closing exhibition. There's scant evidence of a Southern upbringing in his voice. What's easy to hear, though, is that he's answered a shitload of Spurs questions lately, and that he's happy to instead shed light on his salad days.

"None of the guys on my

team could dribble," he continues. "I would bring it out, throw it to the wing and then go to the block and post up."

The competition at Dallas' Seagoville High School was more legit, as the school frequently faced the likes of Chris Bosh (Lincoln) and Ike Diogu (Garland). As an eighth-grader, that's where Aldridge believed he belonged. So he proved it.

"There was a guy playing my position [at Seagoville], and I was talking trash to him," Aldridge remembers. "The high school coach was like, 'If you think you're better, play him one-on-one.' But I couldn't really play 'cause I had on these hard-ass jeans and no basketball shoes. He beat me. I was like, Tomorrow, I'm gonna have on my hooping gear. I came back the next day with shorts on and some hooping shoes and beat him like 10-1. So my first day there, I was known as the starter."

Aldridge made major strides as a freshman at Seagoville, and by his senior year was a McDonald's All-American. His HS class included a handful of guys

who made the jump straight to the pros—Dwight Howard, Al Jefferson, Josh Smith and Sebastian Telfair among them—and Aldridge was right on par. He remembers how his mom found out.

"She didn't really know I was good," Aldridge says. "I never said anything, and she was always at work. Her co-worker would be like, 'Man, your kid at Seagoville is really good.' She wouldn't pay it no mind. Eventually, people started telling her, like, 'Girl, your son is good.' She was like, 'Is he?' She was my biggest fan after that."

Aldridge declared for the 2004 Draft out of high school but withdrew his name and instead enrolled at Texas. As a sophomore, he carried Texas to the Elite Eight and was the Big 12 Defensive POY. Best of all, home games felt like home games.

"Having my mother, my brother and my nieces and nephews in the stands—that made the games even more fun for me," Aldridge remembers. "[It was] everything that I wanted being home. I didn't go

out of state for ball 'cause I felt like Texas had what I needed—a good support system.”

Gregg Popovich wasn't lying.

No, early in the summer, when he said he planned to be in bed when free agency began at midnight on July 1—rather than working the phone lines, trying to sweet-talk free agents—he meant it.

“Nobody called me at 12:01,” confirms Aldridge.

A handful of teams eventually reached out to LA, but none could match the potential for both individual and team success offered in San Antonio. The Suns threatened, but the Spurs answered: A call from Duncan, texts from Tony Parker, a face-to-face meeting with Popovich himself.

“It was good to see him in a different light,” Aldridge says of his new coach. “He’s a very caring person, a winner, and he’s strict. That’s why he’s had the success he’s had.”

There’s plenty more coming. With no disrespect to the great Spurs teams that trucked through the 2000s, this might be Pop’s most talented roster yet. Aldridge is the best big man the Spurs have had since Prime Duncan, and Current Duncan was one of only two players in the League to average at least 13 points, 9 rebounds and 1.9 blocks per game last season (along with Anthony Davis). If Parker has lost a step since he debuted ’01, his unselfishness and moxie more than compensate—there’s no point guard better suited to run this show. Danny Green is among the League’s most accurate and prolific three-point shooters. As for Kawhi Leonard, well, “Everybody knows he’s one of the best two-way players in the game,” says Aldridge.

If San Antonio struggles offensively some nights—which could happen—quality defense should keep the team afloat. Green and Leonard are strong on the wing, and Duncan and Aldridge are committed, solid post presences. (Aldridge expects that he and Duncan will do some switching against opposing bigs, but admits that, “Nobody knows but Pop.”)

The Spurs’ bench was the highest-scoring unit in its conference last season, and David West should absorb the roughly 25

nightly minutes that belonged to Aron Baynes and Matt Bonner. Despite Manu Ginobili’s decline, he remains frightening with the ball in his hands and the game on the line. Boris Diaw picks apart defenses at zero miles per hour, and there is no way to stop him.

Critics will wonder about Popovich bringing Aldridge, an outsider, into a famously harmonious environment. The Spurs won 55 games last season—ho-hum—and Aldridge’s occasional need for isolated possessions could disrupt the team’s renowned free-flowing system. True, for a restrained franchise, the Spurs acted out of character by indulging in a chancy free-agency chase and the cost-cutting trade of Tiago Splitter. But it would be shocking to see this thing flop.

Just ask LA’s buddy, Crawford. “Going to San Antonio is going to solidify everything he’s done,” he says. “He will be in the Hall of Fame when all is said and done.”

Or, for a typically unassuming prediction, just ask Aldridge himself. “They know how to plug guys into their system, so I feel like if it was going to be an issue, they would have passed on me,” he says of his fit with the tight-nit Spurs. “I shoot a lot of mid-range, and Tim doesn’t really shoot that many mid-range. We both can play on both blocks. We both command double teams at times—or at least respect. So I see us playing well together. I see him making my life easier, and vice versa.”

Besides, should the pairing fail, it’s only temporary. Aldridge confirms that Popovich has promised to stick around through the life of his max deal, but the future of the roster itself is a mystery. Ginobili was hesitant to return this season, and, eventually, Duncan and even Parker will hang ’em up, signaling the transition from this generation to the next. Surely, someday, Parker will be replaced by a mix-tape legend currently stressing about the SATs, and Aldridge will become Duncan after Duncan.

Probably.

“Tony had a rough year, but I don’t think he’s at that point,” says Aldridge, referring to the prospect of retirement. “With Tim, he’s already played 200 years, so I didn’t wanna bring it up again.” §







TOWER *of* POWER

FRENCH BIG MAN RUDY GOBERT TRANSITIONED INTO THE NBA AWKWARDLY, BUT HE QUICKLY GOT ON COURSE TO BECOME ONE OF THE BEST CENTERS IN THE LEAGUE.

by LEO SEPKOWITZ

There is an underlying truth about the NBA Draft that surfaces each year as the process ticks into the late first round: If a team wants a certain International Man of Mystery, it best pick ahead of San Antonio.

In June of 2013, one such raw-if-intriguing prospect began to slide. The Spurs, picking at No. 28, had watched him up close and knew him well. The Jazz, having already burned their first-round pick, knew he'd be gone when they picked again at No. 46. So Utah traded up for Denver's No. 27 pick, dishing

just a second-rounder and cash to leapfrog the Spurs and select the Draft's best player.

It's easy to see that last bit now, anyway, just two years into the dazzling career of a so-called project. But Rudy Gobert is annoyed that it took so long to catch on.

"I knew I was going to be better than some guys, but I wasn't going to get drafted higher than them—that's the way it is," Gobert says. "My goal was to be first round—then I knew I was gonna make it, working hard, and get respect from the staff and my teammates."

Gobert, now 23, is phoning in from the Utah Summer League. Lean, lanky and every inch of 7-2, he speaks with a thick French accent (think "Dion-jello Rooh-sell," as in the Lakers' top pick) and refers to doubly beneficial situations as "winning-winning," but any language barrier ends there. He picks Twitter fights (in English) with ESPN for ignoring him as an elite defender. He recalls past statistics with ease. Thankfully, a box score in Salt Lake City reads the same as one in, say, Saint-Quentin, the small French city where Gobert grew up.

His nickname, the Stifle Tower, is a nifty nod to both Gobert's nationality and daunting size. He brushes his teeth directly before each game ("Every time, he's the last one to the huddle," says teammate Trevor Booker), though whether this hygienic tradition has French roots is unclear.

The ascending star is a scout this week. Utah's summer roster features three first-round picks from the past two Drafts—key pieces to a promising rebuild that mercifully skipped the tanking phase—and Gobert is in town to observe. Yesterday,



22-year-old Rodney Hood led the Jazz with 18 points in a win over Boston.

Gobert, one of six active NBA players born in France, made his faux-NBA debut against similar competition two years ago, back when he was known for mythical measurables and little else. His wingspan was the fourth-longest ever recorded at the basketball combine. When Gobert was selected at No. 27, announcement of his 9-7 standing reach prompted an ESPN panelist to proclaim, "He should have been the first pick!"

If that was meant as a joke, the League is no longer laughing. After spending his rookie season as a small sample-size standout, Gobert has developed

into a formidable defensive anchor as a sophomore. Shooting in Gobert's general vicinity should be considered only in the case of a shot-clock emergency. Had it been Gobert contesting Magic Johnson's fateful skyhook in '87, the ball would have been spiked into 1988.

"He cleans up a lot of our mistakes," says Booker.

Last year, among those who played in at least 50 games for at least 25 minutes per night, nobody forced a lower field-goal percentage at the rim than Gobert. Despite drawing just 37 starts, he trailed only Anthony Davis and Serge Ibaka in blocks per game among qualifiers.

Most of the damage was done following the February trade of

Enes Kanter and subsequent call to the starting lineup for Gobert. The Jazz, off to a 19-34 start, closed the season by going 19-10 after the deal—a pace that would have ranked fourth-best in the West over a full season. During that stretch, the team held the League's best rebounding percentage and permitted the fewest points per game (by a mile—the difference between Utah and the No. 2 defense was the same as the difference between Nos. 2 and 13).

Gobert's minutes spiked to 36 per game in March, a month in which Utah allowed fewer than 88 points nightly. That number was far closer to the all-time record (83.4 by the '98-99 Hawks) than the second-best that month (94.9, Memphis). Gobert's presence did not merely help to make Utah's defense momentarily elite—it propelled the unit into historic territory.

So why, exactly, was Gobert left languishing among undersized college standouts and bench mob energizers as 2013's dreaded second round drew near?

"My English was pretty good, but it wasn't great, so I probably wasn't trained in media-communicating like all the other players were," he offers. "I wasn't saying I was going to be a superstar and stuff like that, but maybe I should have, you know?"

Surely some teams would have liked the heads up.

Rudy Gobert was not born 7-2. He was not even born 7-foot. In fact, early in Gobert's basketball life, he was, by hoops standards, ordinary.

"At first, when I was 15, nobody really wanted me," he says. Gobert dabbled in various sports as a kid, including soccer, karate and boxing. His father, Rudy Bourgarel, played ball as a foreign student at Marist College in the mid-'80s before moving back to France, but there was little pressure on young Gobert to follow suit.

Still, he spent two years at a basketball academy in his early teens, and, at 15, tried out for a number of French youth teams. He accepted the only spot he was offered, in Cholet, five hours west of his childhood home in Saint-Quentin.

Gobert's first three seasons with Cholet were spent on the youth team. He grew eight inches, or, as he puts it, "Twenty centimeters—I don't really know in English—what can I say?"

He cracked Cholet's pro team in 2010 but played in just one game. The following season, he chipped in 13 minutes a night, and 23 the year after that.

A year later, he was in the NBA.

Well, sorta. More specifically, he was often on a bench in the NBA, or else over in Bakersfield, CA, 100 miles north of Los Angeles, with Utah's D-League affiliate, the Jam. Gobert appeared in just 45 games with Utah as a rookie and eight more with Bakersfield.

But inconsistent minutes are just par for the rookie course. Toss in Gobert's lack of state-side experience, his developing frame and his uninspiring Draft slot, and the D-League stints were no surprise.

That didn't make them any more tolerable.

"I was really mad," Gobert admits. "It was frustrating for me—for my pride—to go to the D-League."

If there was an upside to spending time in Bakersfield—other than receiving some extra burn against lesser competition—it came off the court.

Former Belmont standout Ian Clark was twice optioned to Bakersfield alongside Gobert, and twice promoted with him, too. The two quickly became best friends. Though Clark himself was just an undrafted rookie during that 2013-14 season, it was often up to him to show his French teammate the ropes.

"He had to learn how to drive, so I drove with him all the time," Clark remembers. "When he gets in his car, he turns the music up really loud and he likes to sing. In there, and in his hotel room, he sings Beyonce."

Gobert bided his time as a rookie on the fringe easily enough—schooling surprised teammates in pool, studying American slang under Clark's tutelage and, apparently, singing. But his first season in the NBA was hardly what he'd hoped it would be.

"When I came to the NBA, I



I didn't tell teams I was going to be a superstar and stuff like that, but maybe I should have, you know?"

told myself I wasn't going to the D-League because I was ready to play," Gobert says. "That's why I waited one more year in France [before entering the Draft]. Most people in France, too, were saying I'd be going to the D-League."

Those critics were hushed late in the summer of 2014 when Gobert debuted for France's FIBA World Cup team. Despite playing without Joakim Noah or Tony Parker, France reached the quarterfinal to face powerhouse Spain.

Pressed into a lead role, Gobert delivered: 9 points and 13 boards in 23 minutes while holding counterpart Marc Gasol to 1-7 shooting in a victory. France fell to Serbia in the following round, but by then, Gobert, for so long unproven, had proven himself. And he knew it.

"FIBA was really a challenge for me because, in France, people didn't really know me. They thought I was an NBA bench player and wasn't supposed to be good, or maybe at best a good rotation player," Gobert says with told-ya-so pride. "At best."

This NBA season will present a whole new set of challenges for Rudy.

"It was very hard for me in the second half of the season to have blocks because the element of surprise was gone," he says. "Guys were shooting floaters, probably missing most of the time. But that made the team's defense better, so obviously I was happy."

Here, within the game's all-important team-first realm, is where Gobert most separates himself from erratic rim-protectors and overaggressive

stat-chasers.

"Blocking the shot is not most important," says the League's premier shot-blocker.

The proof is in the numbers. Over 26 games in January and February, Gobert averaged 28 minutes, 3.1 blocks and 9 boards per game. When he broke out in March—playing more than ever—his rejections dipped to 2.3 while his rebounds swelled to 14.9 per game.

That's to say nothing of his offense, which steadily improved as his role expanded last season.

"His potential on offense is just as high as his defensive potential," says Booker, once the recipient of a behind-the-back feed from a sprinting Gobert. "Rudy is a super competitor, so he's always working with coaches on his offensive game. You can see it coming around."

If nothing else, Gobert is already a solid complementary offensive piece. He's coordinated, he hits free throws at a 62 percent clip ("I was at 70 percent in France," he points out) and he knows how to get open under the rim if left unaccounted for.

"It's great to play with good ballhandlers and players who can create the danger," Gobert says, crediting teammates like Dante Exum, Trey Burke, Alec Burks and Gordon Hayward for opening up offensive chances.

Of course, Gobert could perfect the Dream Shake and still be chiefly known for his defense. And that's the way he likes it.

"I'm really taking pride in making sure the team is the best defense in the League," Gobert says. "I'm gonna do it for the rest of my career." **\$**

CHANGE LOCATIONS

**BRADLEY BEAL'S
SMOOTH SHOOTING
ABILITY HELPED HIM
BECOME ONE OF THE
BETTER 2-GUARDS
IN THE NBA. BUT TO
BECOME THE BEST,
HE'LL HAVE TO PICK
HIS SPOTS BETTER—
AND HE'S SPENT THE
SUMMER WORKING
ON JUST THAT.**

BY YARON WEITZMAN

No prodding is necessary. All it takes is a simple question for Bradley Beal to acknowledge what both Wizards fans and basketball analytics advocates have been clamoring about for nearly two years.

"The biggest thing for me is that I want to stop taking so many long twos," Beal says when asked what he's worked on this offseason. "I want to take more floaters and threes."

Even when he was a boy, Beal's shooting stroke was picturesque. His mother Besta, a former Kansas State basketball player, made sure of it. Kelvin Lee, who coached Beal at Chaminade College Preparatory School in West St. Louis, tells the following story.

One afternoon about 10 years ago, Doug Taylor, a Phys Ed. teacher in Chaminade's middle school and assistant coach for the varsity basketball team, came running from the school's small gym to Lee's office. You need to see this, he said to Lee,

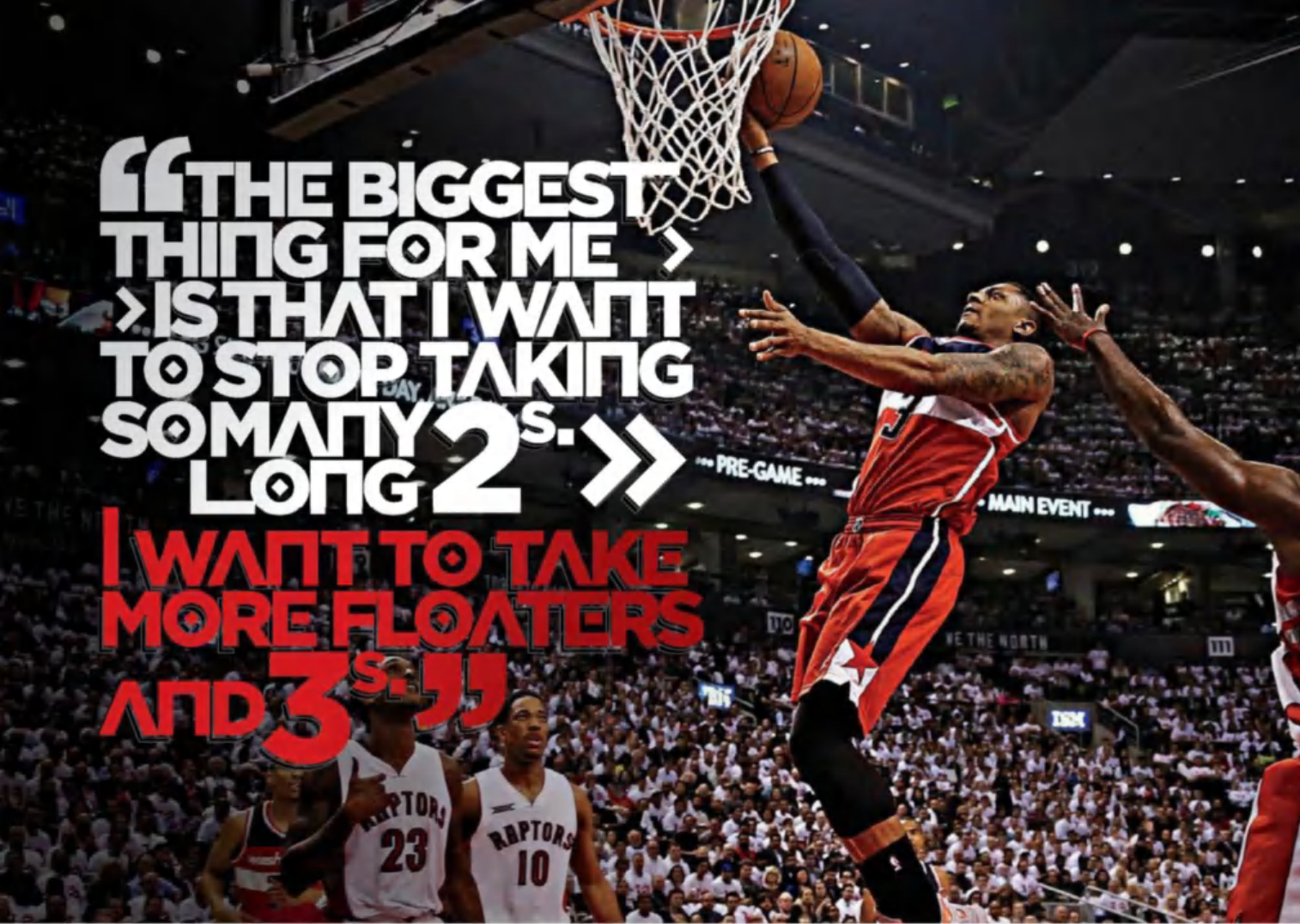
and so the coach got out from behind his desk to check out what the fuss was all about.

"I get to the gym and there's this sixth grader taking, like, real jumpers from behind the three-point line," Lee recalls before adding the kicker, "and making every one."

Beal's jump shot was initially honed in the car-width driveway of his parent's one-story St. Louis flat. Attempts were mostly limited to the area around the foul line. He eventually made it out to the hoops at nearby University City High School and Vinita Park. His two older brothers, Brandon and Bruce, both former college football players, would put him through the ringer: suicides, left-handed layups, dribbling around cones.

Beal's father, Bobby, a jovial and gentle man and like his wife a former Kansas State athlete (he played football), would get in on the fun, too, as would the family's baby twins, Byron and Bryon, both now offensive lineman for





“THE BIGGEST
THING FOR ME
> IS THAT I WANT
TO STOP TAKING
SO MANY 2^S. >>
I WANT TO TAKE
MORE FLOATERS
AND 3^S.”

Central Methodist University.

But it was Besta, the more vocal and stern parent, who taught Bradley the intricacies of shooting. To keep his elbow in and at 90 degrees. His feet squared to the basket. His eyes level. To maintain balance at all times. It wasn't uncommon for Beal and his mother to head out to the local YMCA following high school practices in order to get up an additional 1,000 shots.

That, Lee loved. “You're the man, ma'am,” he used to tell Besta. What he didn't enjoy was Bradley's propensity for drifting out toward the three-point line. “It can ruin you sometimes,” Lee adds, so sometimes during practices he'd change the rules and prohibit his team from shooting from deep. Or he'd have his players run three-man, two-ball shooting drills and only take shots from the midrange. “We'd put a lot of emphasis on those shots,” Lee says.

Roy Pierce, a coach for the St. Louis Eagles, the AAU team Beal played for, held a similar belief.

“When Bradley was 15, he

was kind of just a three-point shooter and wouldn't go toward the basket a lot,” he says. “We definitely worked on that.”

Beal's focus wasn't solely on shooting—he used to don a pair of special calf-strengthening shoes and run the mile-and-a-half back and forth to his grandmother's house in an effort to improve his vertical leap—but it was the effortless and beautiful shooting stroke that caught the eye of Florida coach Billy Donovan.

Beal actually struggled during his one year in Gainesville. He shot just 34 percent from behind the arc and just 25 percent off the dribble (according to DraftExpress.com). But he did improve as the season went on and, well, his jumper was just so smooth. Beal could be standing in a phone booth and have no issue getting his shot off. Even before he entered the NBA it became commonplace to invoke Ray Allen's name when discussing Beal's J.

(Perhaps not coincidentally, Beal, similar to the notoriously obsessive compulsive Allen, is

known as a neat freak. According to Wizards guard Garrett Temple, Beal's apartment is always “tidy,” his clothes are always folded and his locker is always the cleanest in the room.)

The Wizards took Beal with the No. 3 pick in the 2012 Draft and immediately assigned him to assistant coach Sam Cassell. The two quickly connected and Cassell started referring to Beal as “my son.” He also put Beal to work, and for Cassell, a former player who built his 15-year NBA career around burying shots from the 15-19 foot range, that meant developing the mid-range game.

“We did a lot of shooting together,” says Cassell, who's now an assistant in L.A. with the Clippers. “Quick shots, pump fakes, pull-ups off the dribble. I know basketball analytics now say not to take that mid-range shot, and it is a tough shot, but I shot it at a 51 percent clip. I told and tell Bradley to take the shots you can make, and he can make the mid-range shot.”

Problem was, Beal wasn't really making them, at least not

in games. In his three years in the NBA, Beal has never shot over 43 percent from the field—this, despite being a career 40 percent three-point shooter. He did average 15.3 points per game last season, along with 4 rebounds and 3 assists. But he realized he could be an even more proficient scorer if he even slightly altered his approach.

Here's the math: Last year Beal hit just 34 percent of the five mid-range shots (as defined by NBA.com) he attempted per game, the second-worst mark in the NBA among players who averaged at least four such shots. Also, most of those attempts came off the dribble, as opposed to the catch. Beal had spent years perfecting the art of shooting. His form had become impeccable. But by taking difficult shots in crowds, he was holding himself back. It was like seeing The Flash race with his shoelaces tied.

The Wizards, and specifically head coach Randy Wittman, never took issue with Beal's shot selection. “If you're open, he

wants you to shoot it," Beal says. But the epiphany came over the summer when Beal's trainer and long-time friend, Drew Hanlen, presented the Wizards guard with these numbers. The two friends reviewed them and also watched film together on Hanlen's laptop. It was then that Beal decided he needed to change his game.

"It's the worst shot you can take," Beal says. "I always knew I was doing it, but when you see the percentages, and then you review the film and go, Man, if I just take one step back there I'm behind the three-point line...it's just common sense and knowing where you are on the floor."

Beal doesn't plan on ceasing to shoot all mid-range shots, but he would like to cut down on those beyond 18 feet. He also intends to take more floaters this season. He says he's always had that shot in his repertoire but was never comfortable shooting it in games. So this offseason he and Hanlen made the floater a priority. They worked on left-handed and right-handed ones, off the dribble and off the catch.

"I want to get to the point with the floater where it becomes instinctual," the 6-5, 205-pound Beal says. "At the beginning of the summer I was thinking about it too much, but now I'm moving past that."

"It's a tough shot, but definitely a better one than those long twos," which, Beal points out, since harder than a layup and worth less than a three-pointer, is exactly the shot opponents want him to take.

"We used to always joke with him that he was taking the worst shot in the NBA," Temple says. "But that's a shot he's been comfortable with and that defenses give him."

But Temple is also quick to note that Beal's shot selection hasn't presented any issues during the Wizards' Playoff runs the past two seasons. Despite being just 22 years old, Beal has already played in 21 Playoff games. His career post-season averages: 21.2 points, 5.2 rebounds, 4.6 assists. He's helped lead a Washington franchise that hadn't won a Playoff series since 2005 to consecutive first-round victories. In Beal and dynamic point guard John Wall, the Wizards have one of the NBA's top backcourts, a pairing that should have Washington contending in the shallow Eastern Conference for years to come.

Of course, that would require Beal, whose current contract expires after this season, to remain with the Wizards. As of early September the two sides had failed to make any progress

in contract negotiations.

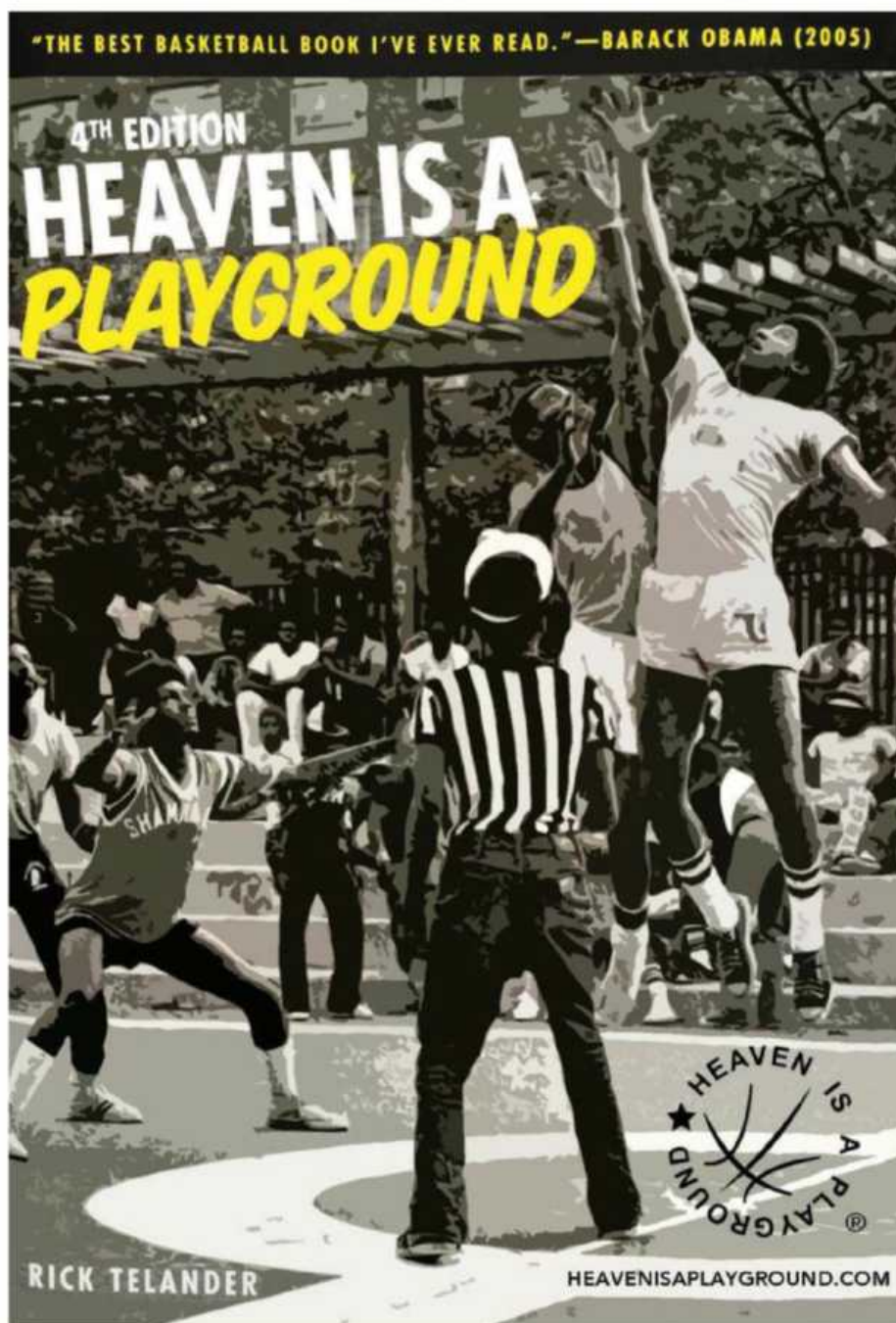
"It's something that [Wizards general manager] Ernie [Grunfeld] and I have been talking about all summer," says Mark Bartelstein, Beal's agent. "Whether or not something does get done, I can't say at this point. Twwhere are a lot of variables that go into it and that's the process we're going through right now."

Beal, for his part, isn't interested in discussing his contract situation—and, well, who can blame him? He already bought his parents a new house, one that his

older brother Bruce says "is too damn big for two people." This summer he got to visit South Africa, China and Taiwan. He's able to get Imo's Pizza, a St. Louis classic and his favorite, delivered to wherever he wants, as evidenced by the chain's willingness to ship four pies out to Beal in Chicago last April. And he's achieved his dream of buying a dog and naming him "King" in reference to a bit by his favorite actor, the late Bernie Mac, in *House Party 3*.

For now, though, all Beal is

focused on is the upcoming season. He's healthy, something that has not always been the case, and excited to see what profits his new approach yields. That Beal has spent his entire basketball life taking the wrong shots is no accident. But now it's up to him to shake the very habits that have gotten him this far. It's not an easy task, but it is one that could make all the difference—for Beal, as he enters his contract year, and for a franchise trying to win multiple Playoff series for the first time in 37 long years. **\$**



What a Time to Be Alive

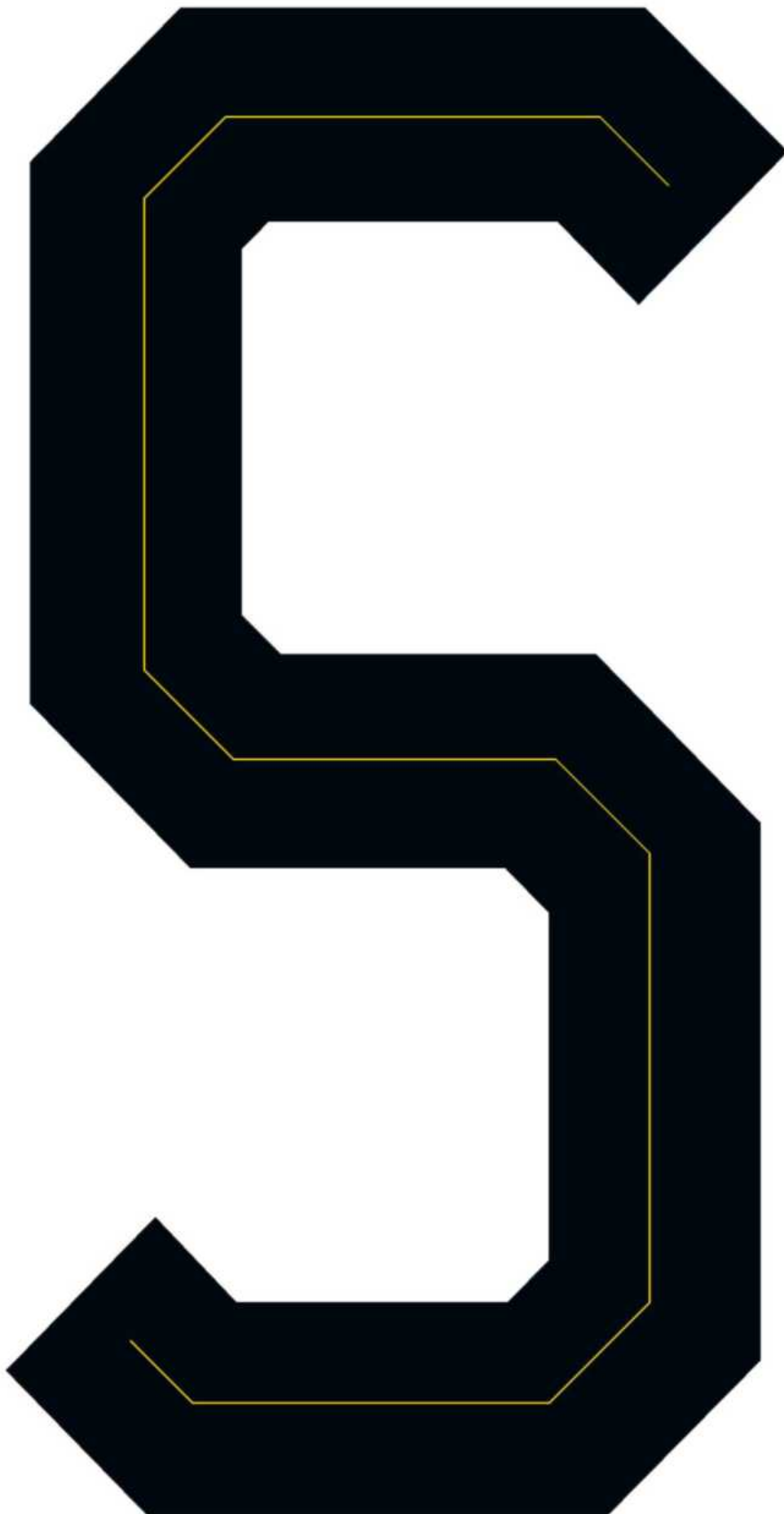
This year, Warriors guard **STEPHEN CURRY** became an NBA MVP, a Champion, an international phenom, a friend of the President and a father to a second child. Not too shabby.

by **ABE SCHWADRON**



"I JUST TRY
TO STAY
APPRECIATIVE
AND THANKFUL
FOR ALL THE
GOOD STUFF
THAT'S
GOING ON."





tares abound, everywhere he goes. Today is no different.

"Media day is always crazy, but I've never experienced it as the reigning champs," Stephen Curry says with a laugh. "As I sit on the phone right now there are 10 cameras pointed at me off the corners of the court."

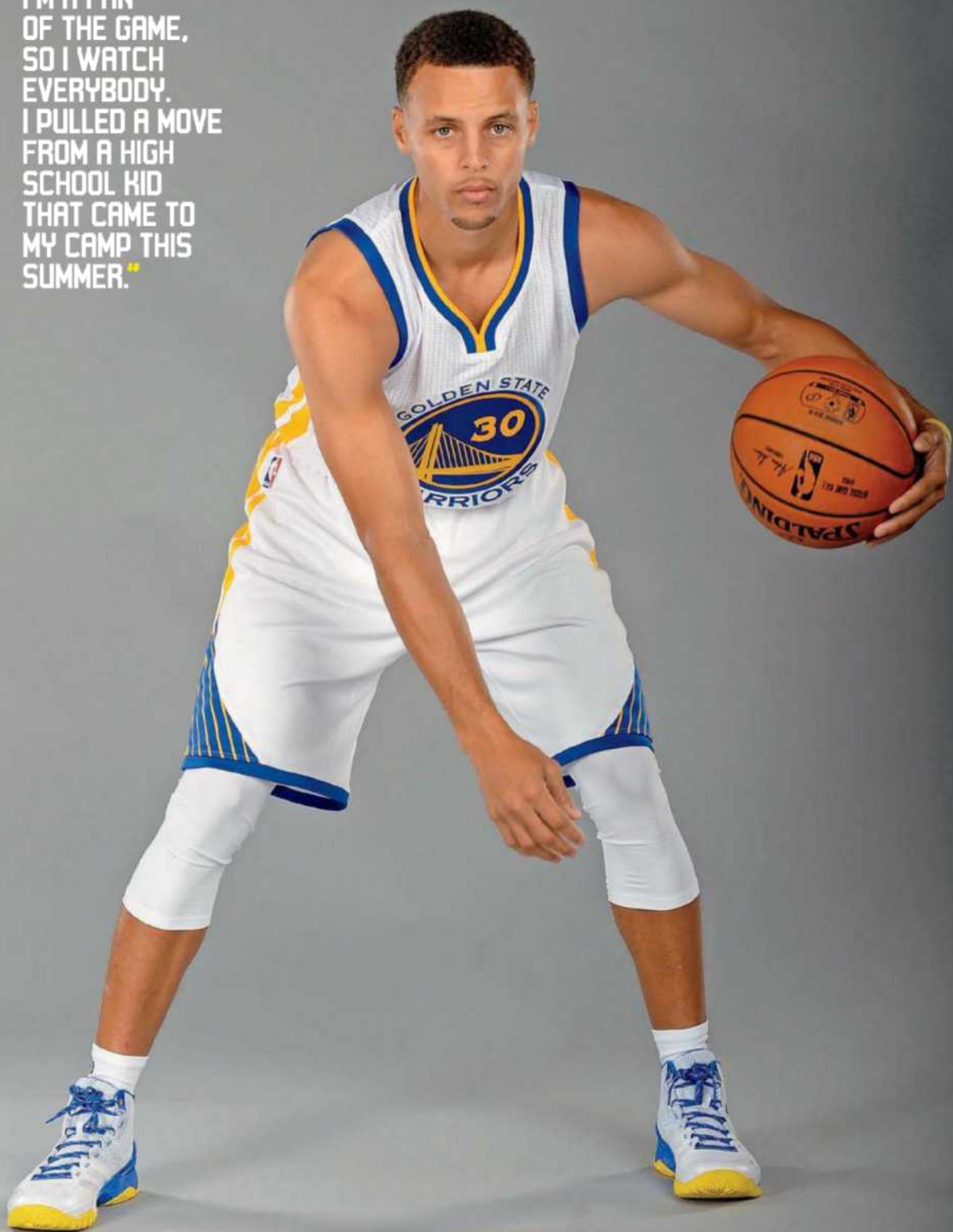
That's what happens when you win regular-season MVP and the NBA title in the same season. You get 10 cameras in your face at all times, plus an international tour with the trophy, appearances on every late night talk show, sneaker releases, video game parties, award shows and hundreds of media requests every day. Oh, and his second daughter, Ryan, was born over the summer, too.

"From the time last August when we won the World Championship for Team USA 'til June 16 celebrating the Finals, a lot has happened," Curry says. It's quite the understatement. "On and off the court, expanding my family too this summer with a new daughter, so, like, all this stuff is happening at once. I just try to stay appreciative and thankful for all the good stuff that's going on. Obviously there's a lot of hard work that goes into it, but it's been a special year. I'll remember it for a long time."

His list of life achievements both personally and professionally over the last year alone probably deserves its own book. He was the overall leading vote-getter for the 2015 All-Star Game. His jersey overtook LeBron James' as the top seller in the NBA. High school kids worship him. Old heads respect him. An Uber driver in Baltimore told us he owns six different pairs of Curry's Under Armour sneakers. Curry is adjusting to a new class of superstardom. The kind where NBA players call you their favorite NBA player.



"I'M A FAN
OF THE GAME,
SO I WATCH
EVERYBODY.
I PULLED A MOVE
FROM A HIGH
SCHOOL KID
THAT CAME TO
MY CAMP THIS
SUMMER."





A couple days before the Lakers made Ohio State point guard D'Angelo Russell the No. 2 overall pick in the 2015 NBA Draft, he stopped by to chat with us. We asked him to name his favorite player.

"Steph Curry."

OK, which current NBA player do you liken your game to?

"Steph Curry," Russell repeated. "I don't want people to take it the wrong way when I say Steph," he adds quickly, in case anyone thought he was promising to win an MVP any time soon, "but when he first came into the League, he wasn't the player he is now, and I see similar characteristics on the floor."

OKC Thunder rook Cameron Payne called Curry his favorite, too. In fact, only LeBron, KD and Kobe got more votes for favorite player than Curry on NBA.com's annual Rookie Survey. And it's not just rookies, either. In

September, a fan tweeted Curry's former Warriors teammate Jordan Crawford, asking him to name his favorite player in the L. "Right now gotta be Mr. Curry," Crawford replied, before adding with the help of a few emojis, "Steph Curry is the only player around my age when I see play he makes me want to get in the gym immediately."

Milwaukee Bucks point guard Greivis Vasquez, who worked out with Curry a few times before the Warriors made him the No. 7 pick in the 2009 Draft, echoes Sizzle's sentiment. "Steph has become an idol for a lot of young kids, but also for a lot of guys in the League, too. I look up to Steph," says Vasquez, who is a year older than Curry, "because at first, people were doubting him—'Oh, he's got an ankle problem,' or about what he signed for. And then all of a sudden, he made himself into the

player that he is right now."

Seriously, it seems like everyone has a Steph Curry story. Raptors first-round pick Delon Wright met Curry when his brother Dorell was playing for the Warriors. He gushes remembering when Stephen would take time to chat with him during warmups back then, and now he admits "I've watched so much film on this guy." Before doing battle as Western Conference foes, fellow UA endorsee and Spurs PG Patty Mills faced off against him in what would be the final game of Curry's illustrious collegiate career.

Fifty years from now, when your kids' kids read about Curry's ascension to MVP and champion, it might make sense on paper: Former NBA player's eldest son is better than he ever was. But when you look at Stephen Curry, at 6-3 and not even 190 pounds, dominating

the 21st Century cyborgs that modern-day athletic training has produced, it's astounding. So often our basketball heroes are just that: Superheroes. LeBron, KD, Anthony Davis. They're athletic freaks of nature, born with one-in-a-million genes. You can't dunk like LeBron, move like Durant does at 7-feet tall or stuff a puny drive like AD. Physically, Steph won't ever either ("I don't know," he says, "maybe I'm finally hitting my growth spurt!"). But it doesn't matter.

"The one word that comes up all the time is fearlessness," says Mills. "The stature, and his size, he's been told a lot of times that he can't do it, but then he comes out and gets better. It's like a beast has been awakened."

Word up. Over 80 regular-season games in 2014-15, Curry averaged 23.8 points, 7.7 assists, 4.3 rebounds and a career-high 2.0 steals per game, shooting

49 percent from the field, 44 percent from the three-point line and 91 percent from the free-throw line (best in the League). And the Warriors won 67 games, easily the NBA's best record. In 21 more Playoff games en route to the title, he bumped his scoring to 28.3 ppg, while his other numbers hovered around the same. In the Finals, he guided the Dubs to a 4-2 series win over LeBron and the Cavs.

To get even nerdier, Curry finished last season with a usage rate over 25 percent, an assist rate over 35 percent and an offensive rating over 120, with a true shooting percentage over 60 percent. To put that in historical terms, the only other player to put together a season like that over the last 15 years is LeBron, who did so in 2012-13. Throw in Curry's top-5 steals rate, and it's one of the most well-rounded seasons ever, unique to him.

So with an MVP and a ring in the bag at 27, does he keep a running checklist of career accomplishments?

"Nah," he says. "I don't, really. I mean, it's about winning. Like, whatever it takes to make that happen. For me, I don't want to lose focus on what's important. So yeah, winning MVP was amazing and something that I've worked really hard for. But that wasn't the goal, to come into the season and say, I want to win MVP. You come into the season and say you want to be better than I was the year before, be smarter than I was the year before, more consistent than I was the year before. I think that's the motivation I need to go out and play well every single night. I'm not really putting the pressure on myself to say, I need to go out and earn an MVP award. That's where I lose focus, so that's my approach. I think it helps me just stay in the moment."

Every appropriate adjective in the English language—and probably others—has been used to describe Curry's game, in the pages of this magazine and others. They range from mesmerizing to unstoppable to revolutionary. Boil it down and it's pretty basic: No player in the game today is more fun to watch flow. Look no further than the Dubs' first pre-season game of their title defense, when against Toronto, Steph whipped the ball

behind his back twice on a fast break, swung the ball, sprinted to the opposite corner, received a cross-court pass, launched a three and turned to dap up Andre Iguodala on the bench before the ball even went through the net. (Which it did, obviously.)

With his theatrics, Curry has become not only one of the three or four best players walking the planet, but a worldwide pop culture icon. Of all the opportunities that came his way post-Championship, Stephen points to his round of golf with President Barack Obama as the highlight. Nevermind that the rest of the foursome included his pops and Ray Allen.

(Recognize, dude played golf with Obama. Which means if you don't like Stephen Curry, you're not only a fun-hating loser with no appreciation for the aesthetic beauty of basketball, but you're now officially an un-American fun-hating loser with no appreciation for the aesthetic beauty of basketball.)

Hitting the links with the POTUS was oddly appropriate, since Stephen and the Currys have quickly become the First Family of Basketball. There's his father Dell, the OG who played for five NBA teams in the '90s. There's his younger brother Seth, who lit up Summer League and could finally break through with Sacramento this season. There's his daughter Riley, who has almost as many fans as her dad, and who will probably run for President some day. His wife, mother and sister can't be shown during a TV broadcast of one of Steph's games without a flurry of Twitter screencaps accompanied by heart-eyes emojis. Everyone wants a piece of the Curry crew.

Like in September, when Curry—in the midst of a stretch that saw him travel from New York to Baltimore and back, then New York to North Carolina and back in a half week's time—planned what he thought would be a low-key trip back to his alma mater, Davidson College, about 25 minutes outside Charlotte. The plan was to catch up with a few of his former coaches and teammates who still live or work in the area. But when word got around that he was scheduled to be in town, the school asked if Curry would mind doing a short

Back to Back

Stephen Curry's second signature sneaker looks to build on the momentum put in gear by the first.



The Warriors won their first Championship in 40 years last June, which will be a tough act to follow. Equally tough, for Golden State's best player, will be to repeat the success of his first signature sneaker. In February, Stephen Curry and Under Armour launched the Curry One, which instantly became one of the most popular models on the basketball performance market, selling out damn near everywhere it was available. Considering the killer combination of high-performing product, beloved player and wavy design, it was no surprise. This fall, Curry and his UA team are looking to come back with a second round of hot-sellers right away.

As early as May, Stephen was spotted rocking what we all presumed to be the Curry Two at Warriors' practice. A few months later, he wore a patriotic colorway of the Curry Two at Team USA min-camp in Las Vegas, and by early September he was releasing the sneaker's first retail colorway, "Iron Sharpens Iron," exclusively during his first-ever tour of Asia, which included stops in China, Japan and the Philippines. Inspired by Curry's mantra to constantly "make my teammates better," the Iron Sharpens Iron colorway has a gray upper with a back layer of yellow that seeps through the perforated patterning, contrasting with the orange to yellow fadeout in the midsole. Look closely and you'll see the speckling, a little flair to represent the forging of metal, according to the brand.

Two weeks after the Curry Two was officially unveiled, Under Armour announced the extension of Stephen's partnership with the brand through 2024. Just like the Dubs, UA hopes this is the beginning of a dynasty.

UA bills the Curry Two as the first basketball shoe with a full-length Charged Cushioning midsole unit, which absorbs impact and turns it into a responsive burst, and a UA SpeedForm seamless upper, which is molded to Stephen's foot, giving him full range of motion and the ability to move without restriction. Perforations keep the sneaker light, durable and breathable, whether for the NBA Finals or a streetball showdown. Concocting footwear to make a wizard like Curry even more unguardable? Defenders be like, aw man...

"In the Curry Two, Stephen has freedom of movement, responsive cushioning and strategic stability," says Dave Dombrow, VP of Design, Footwear and Accessories at Under Armour. "What makes Stephen great is that he plays like no one we've seen: at any moment he's going to do something we didn't think possible. We drew from that to build a shoe that allows him to play unlethered while staying in control of movement and speed."

Dombrow's design team also included an external heel counter on the Curry Two that locks the foot into place for a secure, snug fit that cuts down on sliding. A rubber herringbone traction pattern on the outsole gives it multi-directional grip, too.

The Curry Two (\$130) made its on-court debut in Golden State's pre-season opener vs. the Raptors, with the MVP splashing in 14 points while rocking what the streets called a Carolina Panthers blue PE. Expect to see the reigning MVP get buckets in a variety of colorways this season, including editions like "Dub Nation," "Father to Son" and "Suit & Tie."

The challenge of releasing a player's first two signature sneakers in the same calendar year is a daunting one. Even downright risky, if you ask some. But if there's anyone who can go back-to-back, it's Stephen Curry.—AS



Q+A with some students. Of course, Stephen obliged.

The event, scheduled for 11:30 on a Thursday, wasn't announced until the night before, in hopes of keeping hordes of his fans around the state from descending on the typically quiet college campus. By 7 a.m. the next morning, there was already a line twisting out the door of the school's Duke Family Performance Hall. And before he could even make his way from the parking lot across campus, Curry's presence sent things into a frenzy. Flanked by security guards, including one assigned solely to protect the Larry O'Brien Trophy, and a shrieking herd of kids peppering him with pictures, it was like something out of a One Direction tour stop.

The fireside chat was hosted by Steve Rossiter, a teammate of Curry's on the 2008 Davidson team that captured everyone's

imagination during March Madness by making the Elite Eight as a 10-seed. Curry reminisced about his early Davidson days (like his 13-turnover collegiate debut, a win) told stories from his celebratory summer and laughed as a group of girls in the front row playfully cheered his every response. Afterward, when Rossiter and the rest of Curry's old bball buddies headed over to an on-campus cafeteria for lunch, he says so many people wanted face time, it took Steph 45 minutes just to take a bite of his food.

Global celebrity status notwithstanding, Rossiter insists that Curry is "the same exact person that he was when I first met him." Steph's just, you know, a little bit busier now.

"It's like, is he gonna respond to my text or return Obama's call?" says Rossiter, without even a faint hint of facetious-

ness, despite how ridiculous it may sound to say aloud about a kid whose oversized No. 30 Davidson jersey used to look so big on his tiny frame it almost resembled a cape. "It puts it in perspective when you're around him again. He gets pulled in so many directions, and he has all these obligations now besides basketball, with sponsors and appearances. It amazes me every single time, just how much stuff he has on his plate, and how he handles himself."

After the Finals, Curry called his trainer in Charlotte, Brandon Payne of Accelerate Basketball. Knowing the kind of summer he was about to endure, Curry told Payne he needed him to move out to the Bay for the offseason. So Payne packed up and headed west, tasked with keeping Steph's basketball schedule on point throughout all the craziness that was to come.

"Sometimes I don't even know how we fit them in. But we always find the time," says Payne of the off-season workouts, which the pair have been doing together since linking up during the lockout in 2011. "Sometimes that's at 6 o'clock in the morning, sometimes that's at 10 o'clock at night. We find time to get on the court, to get in the weight room, no matter where we are."

Payne even sent Curry detailed workouts to complete during his five-day UA promo trip in Asia. At times the workout plans are atypical, designed to include neuromuscular or cognitive benefits, because Payne says, Steph is too good at normal basketball drills.

"I have to come up with things to keep him engaged, because he masters things so quickly," Payne admits. "It's difficult to come up with enough things to keep him stimulated."

"I LOOK UP TO STEPH, BECAUSE AT FIRST, PEOPLE WERE DOUBTING HIM—AND THEN ALL OF A SUDDEN, HE MADE HIMSELF INTO THE PLAYER THAT HE IS NOW."

—VASQUEZ



"With him, there really are no boundaries," he adds, speaking in particular about his scoring ability. "He has such tremendous shooting mechanics and he has great balance, his hips are always in the right place. So for him it's just really about trying to find that extra six inches to a foot to get an even cleaner look off, and doing it in different ways that defenders haven't seen before."

At one point during his visit to Davidson, he was asked about the single most creative play from his historic 2014-15 season, when he careened through traffic against the Clippers, dribbled backward, turned and fired what for any other player breathing would be as ill-advised a three-pointer as you can chuck up with plenty of time left on the shot clock. For Curry, it was pure cash. ESPN's Jeff Van Gundy called it "the greatest move I've ever seen."

Curry re-traced his steps for

the crowd but couldn't explain the shot choice other than to say simply, "creativity got the best of me."

It's hard to contain the MVP's creativity. That's the terrifyingly fucked-up part for his opponents: Stephen Curry is going to get even better. Keep in mind, dude doesn't even have a go-to move yet. But maybe he likes it better that way.

"I have some things that I do well, like a stepback and you know, pull-up threes and behind-the-backs, all that stuff, but I don't really know if I have a signature move like, Alright give me the ball, I'm going to do this move. It's all about just being creative," says Steph. "You can always get creative, and I don't know exactly what that will mean once I get out on the floor, what might come out."

And like any supremely gifted artist at work, Curry is always

drawing inspiration from others.

"I'm a fan of the game, so I watch everybody. I pulled a move from a high school kid that came to my camp this summer," Curry says. "I'm always learning."

That high school kid was Dennis Smith Jr, a five-star Class of 2016 NC State commit who attended Curry and Under Armour's SC30 Select Camp. During 1-on-1 drills, Smith pulled a move combo that finished with a dunk so ferocious that Curry looked up from his phone, jumped off his perch on the baseline bleachers and demanded to see a replay from a nearby cameraman. A few weeks later, Steph busted out a series of mind-boggling new moves at Team USA Camp in Vegas—including a between-the-opponent's legs dribble into a stepback jumper that he cannot be seriously thinking about busting out in an NBA game—

and acknowledged they were inspired by Smith.

"It's just little stuff like that," Curry says. "Watching basketball, I can always pick up something, no matter who it is."

This year, of course, all eyes will be on Curry and his Golden State teammates. Given the absurdity of his summer, Steph can't wait. "I'm looking forward to the season to kind of slow down and be back in the grind of the day-to-day schedule of the League, practice and stuff like that," he says. "I know there is going to be pressure. But my mentality doesn't change, nor does my team's mentality change. It's not going to be easy, we're going to get everybody's best shot as the Champs. We're sitting where everybody wants to be, so we have to keep that hunger and just take everything in stride this year. It's not going to be a perfect journey, we know that." **\$**

SLAMUPS

STEPHEN CURRY, WARRIORS







SC / CURRY TWO

LIGHT THE GAME UP.

Stretch defenses. Swing momentum. Move the crowd. Prove gameplans wrong. Transform the entire sport. This is the continuation of Stephen Curry's legacy, inspiring a generation of players to challenge the very foundation of our game. **THE CURRY TWO** is engineered for basketball's next great gamechanger.





UA SPEEDFORM

Control the game with seamless precision fit and quick feel of UA Speedform Technology.

**CHARGED
CUSHIONING**

Charged Cushioning™ absorbs impact and converts it into a responsive burst to make your first step and every change of direction explosive.

SC / CURRY TWO



UNDER ARMOUR.



I WILL.

SLAMUPS

STEPHEN CURRY, WARRIORS







INSTEAD OF RANKING
ALL THE TEAMS ONE BY ONE,
WE TOOK A LOOK
AT THE BIGGEST STORIES
OF THE NEW SEASON.

THE next mvp

ANTHONY DAVIS

Six years. That's how long it took for AD to transform from an unknown high school junior at a decidedly non-powerhouse Chicago school to the 2016 NBA Most Valuable Player.

Wait—it's done? What happened? Well, the 22-year-old, two-time League leader in blocks has an answer. Let's review. Last season was a tour de force that included buzzer beaters, devastating put-backs, and the cementing of Davis' must-watch status. The stat lines inspired double takes, too: 34-16-9-7 here, 26-17-9-3 there. He crushed the PER race with a 30.8 rating, ranking just below guys named Wilt, Michael and LeBron on the all-time list. In a must-win season finale against San Antonio, AD scored 31 and punched his first ticket to the Playoffs.

Now he stares up at the next rung on the ladder: dominance. The uncertainty about his status in New Orleans was wiped out like a weak layup attempt after he inked a five-year, \$145 million deal in July. Rumors of new muscle were confirmed with photos that had Pelicans fans on Bourbon Street ordering season tickets along with their big-ass beers. In a city obsessed with its history, the future is now. Let the Brow's time roll. —BRIAN BOYLES

RUNNERS-UP

James Harden,
John Wall

BEST TEAM TO WATCH ON LEAGUE PASS

MINNESOTA TIMBERWOLVES

David Kahn was the best thing to ever happen to the Minnesota Timberwolves. The franchise has long been a *Fargo*-esque comedy of errors deserving this punch line, but it's still true. If they never put a third-year option in Kevin Love's contract, none of this would've been possible.

Or maybe all the credit belongs to LeBron James?

RUNNERS-UP

Milwaukee Bucks,
Sacramento Kings

Without his return to Cleveland, Love's departure would likely have been scheduled for the trade deadline, ending with a disappointing deal of pennies on the dollar.

Then again, it could be Flip Saunders. His patience paid off, ending with not only the Rookie of the Year, but the Rookie of This Year, too.

Whoever deserves our thanks, there's no doubt we should be grateful. The rebuilding process for a team is never pretty. Game after game of tanking in hopes of a pick that never comes or a player who doesn't pan out is more than a process. It's purgatory, where

winning is both a distant hope and a current impediment. The Wolves should've been stuck there for years. Instead, they're now the League's most watchable team.

We've seen it before—land ing once in a generation talent in consecutive drafts—but we never see it for long. They're only allowed to exist for a brief moment before big contracts, prying eyes and hot takes tear them apart. But in that moment, what we see might be the NBA in its purest form: youth run amok, discovering their precocious talent is enough to overwhelm grown men.

Zach LaVine or Andrew Wiggins might dunk on you before this sentence is finished. Karl-Anthony Towns might make you think Anthony Davis was only the beginning. Ricky Rubio might drop a dime that makes you forget he can't shoot and KG will mutter something to make you cover your ears. This team will dominate your Twitter timeline and leave you racing for the rewind button. But what they won't make is the national TV schedule, and that's why we have League Pass.

Thank God for that. Or David Kahn. —MYLES BROWN



Biggest JOKE

PHILADELPHIA 76ers

As bad as the Sixers have been on the court—32-127—over the last two seasons, things could be worse. There's no sex scandal; players aren't dotting police blotters. But being happy your favorite franchise isn't running a crime syndicate is a low bar.

Hopefully someone who plays PG will walk through and can earn consistent minutes here. For a team drunk with constant turnover, the lead guard has been difficult to fill. Kendall Marshall was signed to a four-year deal over the summer, so it's his job to lose.

At least the Joel Embiid cloud won't hang over the team this season. Out for the year, it's hard to envision him ever suiting up. It's not his fault, but life must go on with or without him.

Here's the good news. The team is looking out a respectable starting five. First is Nerlens Noel, who looks like the real deal. As does Jahlil Okafor, who will be the offensive focal point. His presence will dramatically make this team better. As will having Nik Stauskas, who has real ability but was lost in the abyss that is Sacramento. Stauskas can stretch the floor and play both backcourt positions. Crazy to say, but the Sixers might have gotten over. For once. —KHALID SALAM

RUNNERS-UP

New York Knicks,
Brooklyn Nets



BEST First-time all-star KAWHI LEONARD

Beyond the fact that he led the L in defensive rating and steals per game last season and that he patrols the passing lanes and the rim like an apex predator looking for food, or that he never gets beat off the dribble, or that he's already won DPOY and a Finals MVP, Kawhi Leonard is about to be an All-Star.

Gregg Popovich has slowly taken the offensive restrictions off Leonard. He took a career-high 822 shots in 2014-15, way up from the previous year's 645. Now entering his fifth season, Leonard's going to have even more responsibility.

The Spurs' big three have given Leonard more room to work on offense; he got the ball on the block more last season, ranking eighth in post-ups for wings and in the top 50 overall for post-up scoring. That's major evolution right there.

This is the year he starts to ascend as an individual. The next step in KW's progression is the All-Star Game. Expect to see The Claw throw down another one-handed oop up north in February. —MAX RESETER



RUNNERS-UP
DeAndre Jordan,
Andrew Wiggins



BEST DUO

KEVIN DURANT AND RUSSELL WESTBROOK

If everything goes really well for a certain player or two this season, maybe they'll go on a scoring streak that makes 30-point games look like child's play and the basket look like a Pop-A-Shot. Or perhaps someone will evolve into some form of post-human talent who bulldozes everyone in his path as his superstardom is cemented. Those possibilities, you see, are *best-case* scenarios. Things that happen when individual skills become so otherworldly that we, as fans, get so wrapped

up in what's taking place that the mere act of these dudes stepping on to a basketball court becomes television.

These things actually happened the last two seasons in OKC. In '13-14, Kevin Durant scored 25+ points for 41 consecutive games, the third-longest such streak ever. KD finished the season averaging 32 ppg, putting on offensive clinics nightly with an unmatched ability to shoot from anywhere or drive past defenders and finish at the rim like a floating galleon. There are advanced stats we could list that'd prove how insanely good he was, but settle for this: When KD was playing, you had to watch.

Durant's injury-riddled follow-up was pretty rough, and yet the Thunder remained a team you couldn't afford to look away from. They finished

a disappointing 45-37 and missed the Playoffs, but KD's running mate became an absolute force in his own right. Not only had Russell Westbrook's ability to dominate with the ball improved—the guy can run through defenders at will and finish at the hoop with brute strength that a guard has never shown—but he also became good at...everything. He dished 8.6 apg and got 7.3 rpg, numbers highlighted by a streak of four straight triple-doubles. Had OKC won a few more games, Russ might have won MVP.

Now we're getting both. KD is healthy, per team reports and his own words. Russ remains Russ, ever charged up. There's only one ball, but we're about to get Full Strength Durant and Full Strength Westbrook at the same damn time. It's going to be so much fun. —ADAM FICMAN

RUNNERS-UP

Stephen Curry
and Klay Thompson,
Chris Paul
and Blake Griffin



Biggest Off-Court Story

CBA NEGOTIATIONS

In August, Commissioner Adam Silver and Players Association executive director Michele Roberts began negotiating a new CBA. If it's not done by 2017—and only people who believe in the tooth fairy think it will—there will be a lockout or strike and we will be left without the greatest game on earth.

Thanks to the nine-year, \$24 billion TV contract with ESPN/CBS, the cap will go from \$68 million in 2015-16 to approximately \$90 million in 2016-17. It would be the largest percentage jump in over 20 years. Short term, it means role players will be angling for max contracts (hello, Tristan Thompson). It also means that the players, for once, have real leverage.

Roberts can put issues on the table beyond how to divide the cap. She can settle old scores the owners thought were put to bed, like Draft eligibility or lowering—if not demanding the elimination of—the luxury tax. She also has the active involvement of the League's most valuable "asset," union VP LeBron James.

Silver knows he's in a fight over this CBA and he has the skills to play poker with Michele Roberts. He just doesn't have the cards. —**DAVE ZIRIN**



RUNNERS-UP

Clippers' front-office drama, D Rose allegations

Biggest Sneaker Story

JAMES HARDEN WITH ADIDAS

On October 1, James Harden answered his door only to be met with a truck of brand new adidas sneakers. Literally. Surrounded by boxes of shoes, he looked around and said simply, "Swag." The special delivery was just the beginning of Harden's new partnership with adidas—The Beard left Nike this summer for a 13-year, \$200 million deal with adi.

And before the Rockets

superstar even laced up for a single game this season, his name was bandied about in tabloid headlines. No stranger to paparazzi thanks to his highly famous friends, Harden was unfairly criticized for rocking Nikes after his adidas deal was reported. Understand, once and for all: Harden's contractual obligations to Nike were through the end of September, silly click-baiters. His adidas deal activated on October 1 and now in full swing, the H-Town king is looking to challenge his face-of-the-franchise counterparts at Nike (LeBron) and Under Armour (Stephen Curry) for caché in the closely monitored world of kicks.

Undeniably one of the L's most popular players, Harden's

jump to the Three Stripes—and Nike's decision not to match the offer (they had a match clause much like restricted free agency in the NBA)—might not impact either brand's market share right away. But with Harden presumably about to get his own signature line as the best NBA player repping #teamadidas, there will be no shortage of, well, swag. He joins John Wall, Damian Lillard, Andrew Wiggins and Derrick Rose on the roster, though James might gravitate more to his celebrity compadre and brandmate Kanye West, at least when it comes to fashion.

For Harden, inking with adidas offers a chance to have more say in design, marketing and branding. Adidas Basketball GM Chris Grancio lauds Harden a "creator," and it certainly sounds like he'll be hands-on. Meanwhile for adidas, investing in Harden comes with a sizeable price tag, one ultimately softened by the brand's simultaneous decision to let its uniform deal with the NBA expire in 2017. Adidas' commitment to focus on product and players, like Harden in particular (whose name and game ring out from Houston to the Far East), is exciting.

We'll be watching the MVP candidate's kick game all season long. —**ABE SCHWADRON**

RUNNERS-UP

Air Jordan XXX, Under Armour Curry Two vs. Nike Kyrie 2

last men standing

CLEVELAND CAVALIERS



Can this be it? The year the Cavaliers shake off decades of sports heartbreak and bring a title to Cleveland? YES. It says here that is exactly what's going to happen.

And as much as the fans and players want it to happen, and as great a story as it will be, this year's title will not be some sort of gift from the basketball gods. The Cavs are going to earn it.

The hard work started more

than a year ago, when LeBron James came home, taking on an epic rebuilding challenge that honestly went faster than anyone should have expected. The '14-15 roster was thrown together in a couple of weeks, their coach was an NBA novice, and then their second- and third-best players each suffered serious injuries. And still Cleveland was, at one point, up two games to one in the Finals.

The storylines and questions will seem familiar at the start of this season: Is the roster stable (WTF is up with the Tristan Thompson situation?)? Are Kevin and Kyrie healthy? Does David Blatt know what he's doing? The resolutions, by Playoff time, will be resoundingly positive. Aided by some easy games in the Eastern Conference, and a Title-or-bust perspective that

was not entirely in place a year ago, we see LeBron smartly pacing himself this season, taking semi-regular days off from practices and games to stay rested for the long haul. If the Cavs are smart, they'll take the same approach with Love and Irving. You know, like a Spurs East type of thing.

Relatively rested, and with the prospects of a true challenge in their side of the Playoff bracket looking unlikely (we spared you all the traditional Preview package but here's the super-short version: The Bulls and Hawks will be worse and the East in general stinks), the Cavs should find themselves back in the NBA Finals.

Things will unquestionably get tougher there (super-short WC Preview: The Pelicans and Thunder will be better and the West in general is incredibly tough). But, whether it's the Spurs or Warriors (or one of the aforementioned upstarts) who survive the gauntlet of the left side of the Playoff bracket, how much will they have left?

For argument's sake, let's put the Spurs in the Finals. They will be tired, but we also know they will be tough. If Cleveland has home-court advantage (which they should, even if their "Big Three" only averages 65 games played), we can see the first four games being split. Game 5 will be won by the Cavs at home. The Spurs will win game 6 back in San Anton. ABC and NBA execs will be shipping ad dollars to overseas bank accounts faster than the Union's lawyers can get a look at them. Game 7 will be in Cleveland. The world will be on edge. And then, just maybe, LeBron and his beloved Land may get a little special treatment from the "gods." A loose ball here. A convenient call there. And then, finally, it will be time to party in Cleveland. And the last men standing will crumble in joy. —**BEN OSBORNE**

RUNNERS-UP
San Antonio Spurs,
Golden State Warriors

#SLAMTOP50



No one ranks the 50 greatest players in the NBA better than we do. Here's how we see the game's best performing this season.



1 **LEBRON JAMES**

He has no problem saying it, and neither do we: LeBron is the best player on the planet. His Herculean performance in the NBA Finals—averaging 35.8, 11.5 and 8.8—may never be duplicated. Long live the King.



2 **ANTHONY DAVIS**

After one of the top-10 most efficient seasons in NBA history (and by far the youngest to do it), AD has officially reached superstar status. With a new high-powered offense and three-point shot, he is the pre-season MVP favorite.



3 **KEVIN DURANT**

Two foot surgeries and 27 games played last season lead us to being conservative by ranking KD at No. 3. He's playing again without restrictions and it might take him a few weeks to warm up, but he's on track for a bounce-back season.



4 **STEPHEN CURRY**

There's no such thing as a "bad" shot if Curry is the one shooting it. Doesn't matter how many defenders are on him, how much time's left on the clock or whether he's pulling up from 10 or 30, the reigning MVP will probably make it.



5 **RUSSELL WESTBROOK**

No one fills up the stat sheet like Westbrook. He recorded 11 triple-doubles last season, including six in eight games. He may not put up the same numbers this season with KD back, but rest assured, he'll still wreak havoc.



6 **JAMES HARDEN**

Harden averaged career-highs in points (27.4), assists (7.0) and rebounds (5.7), while playing the best defense of his entire career last season. His game is cooler than a snow cone in Houston.



7 **CHRIS PAUL**

Very few plays are as effective as CP3 running the pick-and-roll with Blake and DeAndre. If the Clippers manage to eclipse 60 wins in 2015-16, expect CP3 to be a top-three MVP candidate once again.



8 **BLAKE GRIFFIN**

Griffin posted monster averages of 25.5 ppg, 12.7 rpg and 6.1 apg in the Playoffs, and don't think the assist numbers are a fluke. He assisted on 26.2 percent of his teammates' field goals last season. Anyone think he's just a dunker?



9 **DEMARCUS COUSINS**

How dominant is the Kings' big man? Cousins is the only player in history to average more than 24 points and 12 rebounds in fewer than 35 minutes. And Boogie would be truly unstoppable if he takes better care of the ball and fouled less.



10 **LAMARCUS ALDRIDGE**

LA will have to adjust to the Spurs' game plan—by moving the ball quicker and taking fewer post-ups—but he has all the tools. His mid-range jumper stretches the floor, and he can punish teams in the post.

Leonard: D. Clarke/ESPN/NBAE via Getty Images; Wall: David Laury/NBAE via Getty Images; Anthony: David Laury/NBAE via Getty Images; Gasol: David Laury/NBAE via Getty Images; Irving: David Laury/NBAE via Getty Images; Lillard: David Laury/NBAE via Getty Images; Thompson: David Laury/NBAE via Getty Images; Butler: David Laury/NBAE via Getty Images; Howard: David Laury/NBAE via Getty Images; Love: David Laury/NBAE via Getty Images; Bosh: David Laury/NBAE via Getty Images; George: David Laury/NBAE via Getty Images; Horford: David Laury/NBAE via Getty Images; Rose: David Laury/NBAE via Getty Images; Duncan: David Laury/NBAE via Getty Images; Jordan: David Laury/NBAE via Getty Images; Wade: David Laury/NBAE via Getty Images; Bryant: David Laury/NBAE via Getty Images; Green: David Laury/NBAE via Getty Images; Nowitzki: David Laury/NBAE via Getty Images



11 KAWHI LEONARD

After struggling with a hand injury early last season, Leonard was brilliant down the stretch and won Defensive POY despite playing just 64 regular-season games. No doubt he's in for a big season.



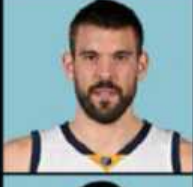
12 JOHN WALL

After averaging a double-double for the first time ever, Wall was snubbed from the All-NBA teams. Add it to his list of motivations. Don't be surprised if he becomes the first player since the '10-11 season to average 20 ppg and 10 apg.



13 CARMELO ANTHONY

After missing the second half of last season, Melo falls out of the top 10 for the first time since we began our current methodology in '09. Questions about his health, commitment to the Triangle and future with the team are out there.



14 MARC GASOL

Perhaps the NBA's most complete big man, Gasol proved he was ready to take on a larger offensive role last season. Top-notch defender. Gifted passer. Dead-eye shooter out to 18 feet. This 7-footer is impossible to guard.



15 KYRIE IRVING

Yes, he's injury-prone, and he'll likely miss several weeks to start the season. But he's the player who—when healthy—can elevate the Cavs to a title. He's a bit of a sieve on defense, but the magic he creates with the ball is second



16 DAMIAN LILLARD

Lillard will have the ball in his hands more than ever, and we'll get to see what he's truly capable of. It's not a stretch to think Dame will improve on his averages of 21 ppg and 6.2 apg while turning it up on defense.



17 KLAY THOMPSON

Thompson, just 25, was all-around dominant last season, averaging a career-high 21.7 ppg with a true shooting percentage of 59.1. He scored a mind-blowing 37 in one quarter, the greatest single-quarter outburst in NBA history.



18 JIMMY BUTLER

The 2015 MIP thrived in the Bulls' offense last season while continuing to lock down players on defense. Jimmy Buckets worked on his handle in the offseason, saying he wants to be a triple-double threat. Who are we to doubt him?



19 DWIGHT HOWARD

Howard limped through 41 regular-season games last season but finally found his stride in the Playoffs, only to injure his knee in the conference finals. Good news is he was healthy enough to attend Team USA camp.



20 KEVIN LOVE

Love struggled at times last season as he adjusted to being the third option behind Kyrie and LeBron. With his shoulder in good shape and a max contract in tow, he can focus on basketball. The table is set for a monster season.



21 CHRIS BOSH

CB was having his best season in a Heat uni before a battle with blood clots in his lungs shut him down for the season. He says the time off re-ignited his passion. This could be a special season as he leads Miami back to the Playoffs.



22 PAUL GEORGE

PG13 is said to be 100 percent and ready to play de facto power forward in Indy's new small-ball lineups. After sitting out most of last year, he still has to cross some mental hurdles. Once he does, George should be better than ever.



23 AL HORFORD

Horford is the Hawks' engine, and with an automatic mid-range jumper and the ability to cut hard to the rim, Al's game is made for the pick-and-roll. He shot 37.2 percent on corner threes last season, so look out for the long ball.



24 DERRICK ROSE

For most of the season, Rose played a cautious game, but when the Playoffs rolled around, he flipped a switch. When he dropped 30 and the game-winner in the conference semis against the Cavs, Rose proved he's still the man.



25 TIM DUNCAN

TD will turn 40 during the Playoffs this season. Only one 40-year-old has ever started for a Championship team: Kareem Abdul-Jabbar. To remain dominant for this long is one of the many reasons why Duncan is an all-time great.



26 DEANDRE JORDAN

Let's not forget why everyone wooed Jordan this summer: He's one of the few game-changing centers in the L. Few players can lead the League in rebounding and field-goal percentage in the same season—DJ's done it twice in a row.



27 DWYANE WADE

Still one of the elite dribble penetrators in the game today, D-Wade still looks like the Flash on occasion. Injuries are a perpetual concern now, but the man just can't be guarded straight up.



28 KOBE BRYANT

Black Mamba may be one of the 10 greatest of all time. But coming off of three major injuries and possibly not playing in back-to-backs, Kobe is lucky to be in the top 30. Just don't underestimate 20 years of NBA smarts.



29 DRAYMOND GREEN

As a full-time starter last season, Dray managed to back up his talk and earn All-Defensive First-Team. Green still has plenty of room to improve offensively, namely becoming more consistent from the three-point line and in the post.



30 DIRK NOWITZKI

At 37, Dirk is still a beast as a pick-and-pop shooter. He's already the NBA's seventh all-time leader in points scored and should pass Shaq for sixth this season. With one of the wettest jumpers of all time, he should never be left open.

 31 ANDRE DRUMMOND The NBA hasn't seen a rebounder as prolific as AD in a minute. We love that he occasionally uses the late Moses Malone's technique of deliberately missing a shot so he can score on the putback.	 41 JOAKIM NOAH Slowed by injuries and a new role last season, Noah seemed nothing like the First-Team All-NBA player from a year ago. Finally healthy, he'll be able to bring his unique blend of intensity, passing and defense to the title-hopeful Bulls.
 32 MIKE CONLEY Perhaps the most overlooked point guard in the game today, Conley has yet to make an All-Star or All-NBA team. That could change this season, as the Grizzlies will rely heavily on their 28-year-old leader throughout the regular season.	 42 BRADLEY BEAL Beal was one of only five players to shoot over 40 percent from three (minimum 250 attempts) and average 15 points last year. If the 22-year-old can stay healthy, it wouldn't be a stretch to see him in the All-Star Game in 2016.
 33 PAUL MILLSAP Fresh off signing a three-year, \$60 million deal, Millsap will continue to be a Swiss Army knife for ATL. Capable of defending multiple positions, scoring from deep or the paint, the two-time All-Star keeps adding to his well-rounded game.	 43 JEFF TEAGUE At times, Teague showed he could be a dynamic scorer, and as an elite penetrator, he led the L in points per minute on drives (min. 8 drives per game). Although sharing is his tendency, he needs to be more assertive.
 34 PAU GASOL Pau had one of the best seasons of his career last year in Chicago, earning an All-NBA Second-Team selection. The 35-year-old was named Eurobasket MVP over the summer and looks to carry the momentum into this NBA season.	 44 ZACH RANDOLPH While the League gets smaller and quicker, Z-Bo (neither small nor quick) is still doing his thing. The grit-and-grindfather himself has averaged a double-double in eight of the past nine seasons. There's no reason to think he can't do it again.
 35 GORDON HAYWARD If the Jazz are to make the Playoffs this season, Hayward will be the one to lead them there. The swingman has been working on his post game to add to his already versatile offensive repertoire.	 45 GORAN DRAGIC The Dragon earned the stability he wanted when the Heat signed the PG to a long-term contract this summer. The dynamic lefty loves to push the pace and drives to the hoop in unpredictable ways, making him a must-watch player.
 36 SERGE IBAKA Even in a down year in 2014-15, Ibaka posted 2.4 blocks per game and sank a career-high 1.2 threes. If his surgically repaired knee is alright, Ibaka could have a major bounce-back campaign in 2015-16.	 46 DEMAR DEROZAN DD is a talented shot-maker who's drawn criticism for being a ball-stopper. He'll have to be more efficient and shoot better—he connected on just 35.6 percent of shots away from the rim last year—to reclaim elite scorer status.
 37 KYLE LOWRY After earning his first All-Star bid, Lowry didn't finish the season as he'd hoped to. His struggles in the fourth (just 37.2 percent from the field) might be in the past, though, as he enters this season in the best shape of his career.	 47 AL JEFFERSON A Top 50 mainstay since his days in Minny, Big Al showed signs of decline last year, most notably a 48.1 career-low field goal percentage. Entering his 12th year, Al will have to prove that he's still one of the baddest on the block.
 38 ANDREW WIGGINS The scary thing about Wiggins is the potential. Sure, he won ROY by a landslide, but how good can he be with a fully developed post game and comfortable handle? The tools are all there for greatness—Wiggins just has to realize it.	 48 RUDY GOBERT Heading into his third NBA season, Gobert is already one of the best interior defenders in the NBA. He's incredibly long and quick off his feet, making him a human shot-swatter. We think he'll lead Utah's defense this year.
 39 TONY PARKER Never super athletic, TP makes up for his physical shortcomings with savvy. He continues to break defenses down by attacking the paint and draining shots from mid-range. And he's added a corner three, evolving even at 33.	 49 GIANNIS ANTETOKOUNMPO Giannis is still very much a work in progress, but the 20-year-old has tremendous instincts and a lanky 6-11 frame with baseball mitts for hands. And watch out, he's got a mean streak, too.
 40 ERIC BLEDSOE As the franchise player in Phoenix, Bledsoe will have every opportunity to shine this season. The explosive lead guard gets into the paint with ease and, despite his size, is capable of locking down any perimeter player on defense.	 50 RAJON RONDO His limited range and free-throw futility have definitely put a dent in his effectiveness, but make no mistake: Rajon Rondo is still one of the best at creating easy buckets for teammates.

2015-2016 ROOKIES MOST LIKELY TO...



AVERAGE 20 POINTS
Stanley Johnson



AVERAGE 10 ASSISTS
Emmanuel Mudiay



AVERAGE 10 REBOUNDS
Jahlil Okafor



UNFAIRLY GET BENCH SPLINTERS
Kelly Oubre



BE ROOKIE OF THE YEAR
Karl-Anthony Towns



DATE A KARDASHIAN
D'Angelo Russell



GET LOVE FROM SNEAKER BLOGS
Devin Booker



GET CAUGHT SLIDING INTO DMS
Justise Winslow



BE A SECOND-ROUND STEAL
Joseph Young



As a child, Matt Scott never took the first steps that a healthy baby usually puts together around his first birthday. He never ran to catch the school bus or rounded third base in little league. Scott was born with spina bifida, a congenital spinal condition that robbed him of the use of his legs even before he had the ability to use them. Still, he was dead set against playing wheelchair basketball when he heard about it around age 15.

"I always played ball with my able-bodied friends and never knew what wheelchair basketball was. I heard about it but didn't really want to play it," says Scott, 30. "Growing up, there weren't other kids in wheelchairs in my school district, none at all."

At home, Scott did the same laundry and took out the same trash as his able-bodied sister. On the courts near the Detroit townhouse where he grew up, he played in the same pick-up games as kids with working legs. Even having both feet amputated didn't stop Scott from wanting to show everyone around him that his paralysis didn't define him.

"Kids from across the city came to play at the courts by my house and they'd always look at me like, 'Is he going to play?'" Scott recalls. "My friends would say, 'Oh, he's going to play, and he's going to kick your ass.'"

Scott earned respect playing on the playground, but he wasn't able to compete in organized ball until he reluctantly gave

wheelchair basketball a spin. Today, Scott is one of the sport's most accomplished players in the world and, after starring in a 2008 Nike commercial, the only even remotely recognizable American. Despite the obscurity, Scott earned gold medals at the Panam American Games in 2006 and 2011 and represented the US in the 2004, 2008 and 2012 Paralympics.

Though adaptive sports date back to the toughest heroes of World War II, athletes still battle a stigma that says wheelchair basketball is more of an activity than a competition or "some kind of charity game," as Scott puts it. With the 2016 Paralympics in Rio coming up, Scott and everyone involved in wheelchair basketball

are hoping to make a statement.

"Whenever I'm in the game, I realize there's someone watching that hasn't seen wheelchair basketball, and I think about what I'm going to show them," Scott says. "I've always felt like this is me, and this is the disability that I have, and that I need to show people that I can do things, or else they're going to think otherwise."

Modern wheelchair basketball began in 1949, when the first National Wheelchair Basketball Tournament was held at the University of Illinois by professor Tim Nugent, the institution's director of rehabilitation. The sport was being championed by wounded soldiers returning from the war in need of rehabilitation



and recreation, but Nugent, who served as the NWBT's commissioner for 25 years, created the tournament to encourage participation among all people with paraplegic conditions and spinal cord injuries.

The tournament evolved into what is now the National Wheelchair Basketball Association, which joined USA Basketball in 1991. The NWBA has a membership of about 2,400 players, on roughly 220 teams across five divisions (collegiate, championship, DIII, women's and junior), playing in local leagues that qualify for the national tournament every year based on a team rankings system.

Although the NBA doesn't sponsor a pro wheelchair league, adult teams in many markets have varying types of affiliations

with NBA clubs; there are the New York Rollin' Knicks, Dallas Wheelchair Mavs and Cleveland Wheelchair Cavs. The NBA also funds an annual "demonstration game" at All-Star Weekend, but no formal arrangement between the groups exists.

"Atlanta bought uniforms for the last three years and Chicago held three wheelchair demonstration games this year, whereas in the past there'd only been one," says NWBA associate director of sports Jeff Jones. "Some teams get good funding that helps with the travel and some get minor financial support [from the NBA]."

The NWBA hopes a new agreement they've reached to work directly with the NBA will help introduce more kids to wheelchair hoops. "We're going

to be working directly with the NBA on a two-year program called Junior NBA, targeting kids 8-14, and we expect the backing of the NBA will help us grow programs everywhere," Jones says. "We add one prep and one varsity team each year, so wheelchair basketball remains the largest sport for kids with disabilities."

One place there is steady interest in wheelchair basketball is among college level participants. Many large universities like Illinois, Texas-Arlington, and Arizona have successful and well-funded programs, but smaller schools, like Scott's alma mater, Wisconsin-Whitewater, have built programs based on catering to the niche.

"Our DIII school competes against every division and all

these teams compete for a national championship," says Whitewater wheelchair athletics director and wheelchair hoops head coach Jeremy Lade. "I think we're meeting the needs of the kids who want to play at the college level, and you'll see more opportunities when more kids are interested in playing."

One issue that has created some division in the wheelchair basketball community is whether to allow able-bodied players to compete against players with disabilities. While most foreign countries allow able-bodied players to compete with disabled players at least on the club level, America has yet to follow suit, as the NWBA has voted down the inclusion of able-bodied players at its national assembly each of the last two years. While proponents of able-bodied players think more participants could only help the game, critics think it would create an unfair advantage on the youth level.

The NWBA membership did, somewhat reluctantly, approve a one-year pilot collegiate program for able-bodied players to play on and compete against other collegiate teams who have able-bodied players, but not against any teams that don't.

"We're on the cusp of having college wheelchair basketball expand and the programs that

"Whenever I'm in the game, I realize there's someone watching that HASN'T SEEN WHEELCHAIR BASKETBALL, and I think about what I'm going to show them." —SCOTT





can't recruit enough student athletes will be able to use able-bodied athletes and help in developing programs," Jones says. "I've never seen an able-bodied player outplay a player with a disability, but it was still a very close vote, we're going to take it step by step and evaluate it."

Wheelchair basketball uses a classification system that rates players based on their functional ability. Players are rated 1-4.5 and higher-rated players tend to be the most able; the total number of ratings points in a lineup cannot exceed 14. The current classification system would prevent unfair advantages and lopsidedness if the able-bodied were regularly allowed to compete against disabled players. Most elite wheelchair players with disabilities are open to the challenges and expanded opportunities the able-bodied would bring to their game.

"I'm a 4.5 and able-bodied players are rated 4.5, as well," says Canada's Patrick Anderson, a four-time Paralympic gold medalist. "In Canada, we have

able-bodied players on our club teams but nothing gives them an advantage over me, I'd say players with disabilities have the edge by power-weight ratio because I'm not carrying extra weight below my knees."

While wheelchair basketball players—disabled or otherwise—are still trying to find their place in the basketball landscape, most players are much better equipped to do so. Scott has a sponsorship deal with Per4Max, a company specializing in sports wheelchairs designed specifically for adaptive athletes.

"I didn't have a basketball wheelchair when I first started playing, just a regular day chair rusted out from the Michigan snow," Scott says. "Improved chairs are really helping advance the game."

Another thought circulating around wheelchair hoops is that having one of their athletes or coaches hired as a major college or possibly NBA assistant coach would help to break the stigma of limitations disabled sportspeople face. Basketball coaches with

disabilities—liters, like current DIII Concordia (WI) University assistant coach Dave Cooks—have coached able-bodied players for years, yet there hasn't been one known to coach on a high level.

"There are a lot of logistics involved, but I'm open to the challenge," says Cooks, a White-water alum and former graduate manager at Duke. "People in wheelchairs want to get into coaching [high-level hoops]—I know I'm not the only one."

After finishing college in 2008, Scott joined Galatasaray, a top pro team in Istanbul, Turkey. Scott says players earn between 500-5,000 Euros monthly competing in domestic and inter-European cups. Anderson, who played pro for four years in Germany, says overseas clubs are "very sophisticated" and fans have a greater appreciation for the game as a spectator sport.

"Most North American talent goes overseas, but if there was a pro league closer to home, it would be special just to be recognized," Scott says. "As long as there is a way for me to

make a living playing wheelchair basketball, I want to do it—but there isn't a way for me to do it in the States."

According to the NWBA, an affluent businessman they would not name recently submitted a proposal to them outlining some type of formal professional league for the US, but for now it's just an idea. "It really starts with interest: How are you going to get funding for something people aren't interested in?" Scott asks.

Wheelchair basketball's best shot to generate interest now is by making a push forward during the 2016 Paralympic Games in Rio, where the US aims to capture its first gold since '88. Scott, who will be 31 and playing in his fifth international tournament, will approach the competition just like he does every other one.

"I've always felt this obligation and responsibility to legitimize the game and get people to check out my sport," Scott says. "It's a tough and beautifully played game, it just needs a chance." **S**



The Sweetest Thing

As will be documented on the big screen in the near future, the impact of **NATHANIEL “SWEETWATER” CLIFTON**—the first African-American to sign an NBA contract—is everlasting.

BY EVIN DEMIREL

Nathaniel “Sweetwater” Clifton didn’t get his due.

In the late 1940s, the all-white Lakers had a widespread reputation as the nation’s best basketball team. George Mikan, a 6-11 big man as dominant in his time as Anthony Davis is in ours, was on the cusp of leading Minneapolis to five of six titles in the NBA and its predecessor league. Yet the 6-7 Clifton almost shut Mikan down while matching him on the boards when the two battled one-on-one in the pro basketball event of the decade.

Clifton was a headliner for the Harlem Globetrotters, which then attracted the nation’s best black players—not the NBA. The extremely talented Globetrotters were good, so good that on a single night in 1949 against a short-handed Lakers team, they rolled out to a lead so large that as the game wound down they started to clown around. Stuffing balls down jerseys and all that jazz. The win was filmed—still a rarity at the time—and shown to millions of

Americans who soon realized the best black basketball players were just as good as the whites who would make up the entire NBA in its inaugural game in 1946.

Yet as accomplished as Clifton was, he wasn’t compensated at anything near the level of the League’s best white players. While among the highest-paid black basketball players of the time, his earnings paled in comparison to even the collegiate stars that the Globetrotters took on.

“We played an all-star game [in 1949] against a team Bob Cousy was on,” Clifton told the *Chicago Sun-Times* in 1986. “After the game, Cousy, who got to be a pretty good friend, asked what [owner] Abe Saperstein paid us. He showed me his check for \$3,000. I was ashamed to show him mine. It was for \$500.”

By 1950, New York Knicks president Ned Irish was ready to give Sweetwater a chance. He purchased his contract from the Globetrotters in May 1950 for \$10,000. Clifton later recalled. Clifton became the first



black player to sign an NBA contract. (He was technically the second to sign an NBA contract, but Harold Hunter, who did so beforehand, never played in an NBA game.) He followed Earl Lloyd as the second African-American to play in the League.

Sweets, as he was best known, had immediate impact. He helped lead the Knicks to three straight NBA Finals appearances while practically averaging a double-double. His long-time affinity for any kind of sweetened drink led to him becoming an ad pitchman for Coca-Cola, a nascent sign of the vast cross-cultural influence black NBA players would accrue in later decades, according to Martin Guigui, a director who has researched Clifton's life for nearly two decades.

By all accounts, Sweetwater was a soft-spoken, hard working man whose professional conduct helped open the doors of opportunity for great black players like Elgin Baylor and Bill Russell who would follow him. "He was a pioneer for me and a lot of other African-Americans," Oscar Robertson said in a tribute at the 2014 Naismith Hall of

Fame enshrinement ceremony.

While Clifton, who passed away in 1990, was comfortable with his role as a trailblazer, he wished he could have done more. He regretted not having a shot at more stardom in his own right. "I feel like I was the best player in the League in my day," he told the *Sun-Times*. But "I was only allowed to shoot about six or seven times a game... Only when it was late in a tight game would they turn to me for scoring."

The coaches didn't design offensive plays for him despite the fact he occasionally chipped in more than 30 points a game. "All I was really allowed to do was to rebound, hand the ball over to my teammates and guard the toughest players on the other teams."

The rare opportunities in which he showed his stuff left jaws dropped. "He could cross the court in five strides," and had what today would be a three-point shot, Guigui says. Sweets also handled the rock better than most other players at his position. Guigui says he has footage of him bounding downcourt, throwing the ball

off the backboard and slamming it down, à la the Tracy McGrady self alley-oops of the early 2000s. Such displays were generally not welcome by coaches and other players, as Clifton recounted to the *Sun-Times*: "I realized that, being the first black, I couldn't do anything people'd notice. So I had to play their type of game—straight, nothing fancy. No back-hand passes. It kept me from doing things people might enjoy."

Restraints notwithstanding, in 16 total years in the NBA, the Globetrotters and touring team spinoffs, Clifton secured a legacy as a critical figure in the evolution of basketball from brutal, floor-bound East Coast roots to the high-flying global phenomenon it is now. "More so than being one of the first African-Americans, along with Chuck Cooper and Earl Lloyd, he really shifted the game," Guigui says.

Clifton developed his innovative style alongside basketball geniuses like Marques Haynes and Goose Tatum, who were his Globetrotter teammates. That franchise's beginnings trace not in Harlem, but to the

South Side neighborhood in Chicago where he grew up.

Since the age of 6, when his family moved from Arkansas, Clifton saw some of the finest basketball players of the Depression Era play in and around the South Side Boys Club.

Al "Runt" Pullins, a prodigiously gifted 5-8 scorer with the original Globetrotters, "was about the greatest I had ever seen. That's who I copied most of my style from," Clifton said on a 1985 episode of *Once a Star*.

Clifton took to heart what he watched the young men do, and became a star at DuSable High School and Xavier University in Louisiana. Not just in basketball, either. Sweets was considered an even better baseball player, so good that in the late 1940s, he was on the cusp of the majors after leading a minor league in home runs, total bases and batting about .350, according to Chicago sportswriter Sam Smith. He was even more intriguing to the likes of Cleveland Indians owner Bill Veeck after success in a higher minor league, batting over .300 and again leading in homers and RBIs.

"He was a pioneer for me and a lot of other African-Americans."

—OSCAR ROBERTSON



Afraid he'd lose one of his star players, Globetrotters owner Abe Saperstein quickly arranged for Sweets to play on a world tour, Smith wrote in the 2014 Hall of Fame enshrinement guide.

Clifton's life changed forever in 1950, a year holding the same importance in basketball annals as 1947 when Jackie Robinson broke baseball's major league color barrier. Yet for decades, Hollywood has largely ignored this monumental turning point.

That changes soon.

Sweetwater, the first major motion picture focusing on the NBA's first years—is now in production and is scheduled to come out next year, according to director Martin Guigui and IMDb.com. The plot centers on two eventful stints in 1950—the NBA Draft and signing of Clifton, as well as the week around Halloween when Lloyd, Cooper and Clifton “were sort of pitted against each other in a race to see who would be the first black NBA player,” Guigui says.

The roughly \$20-million film will star the 6-3 Wood Harris, who's perhaps best known as Avon Barksdale from *The Wire* and made his film debut in the 1994 drama *Above the Rim* with Tupac Shakur. The ensemble also includes Nathan Lane (Saperstein), James Caan (Ned Irish) and Ludacris (musician Louis Jordan).

Sweetwater will draw inevitable comparisons to the 2013 Jackie Robinson biopic *42*.

Clifton, like Robinson, had to deal with persistent, vile streams of racism that could make even Donald Sterling blush. Yet both pioneers overcame the adversity. Robinson played in six All-Star games while Clifton played in the NBA All-Star Game in 1957 at the age of 34—to this day that remains the oldest age of a first-time All-Star.

“*Sweetwater*’s fight for acceptance in the basketball world is an example of the struggle faced by so many African-Americans at that time,” NBA Commissioner Adam Silver says. “As one of the NBA’s first African-American stars, he not only laid the groundwork for the League to become the diverse institution it is today but also help drive social progress across the country.”

But Clifton and Robinson got to this end in different ways.

Robinson was famously stoic in the face of opponents’ taunts, especially in public and during games. Clifton usually was, too. Except when too much was too much.

Once, during an exhibition game against Boston, Sweets threw a dazzling pass past Celtic Bob Harrison. Harrison didn’t appreciate the style points at all, Clifton told the *Sun-Times* in 1986. “He said, ‘No nigger do that to me,’” recalled Clifton. “It was a one-lick fight. I was lucky enough to knock him out.”

Clifton was not only a fighter, but a lover who enjoyed the New York nightlife. *Sweetwater* will depict his affair with a high-society orchestra vocalist who aspired to sing the blues. “She’s a white woman who wants to live in a black man’s world and Sweetwater was a black man wanting to live in what was then a white man’s world,” Guigui says.

Clifton played in the NBA for eight seasons with the Knicks and then the Pistons. He spent

much of the last 30 years of his life driving a yellow cab around Chicago, sometimes picking up the NBA stars for whom he’d help pave the road to millions. More than a few times, an older passenger would peer at him for a minute, seeing something familiar in his pronounced chin and massive hands.

They would ask, “Have you got a brother or something like that playing ball?” Sweetwater told *Once a Star* documentarians while driving his taxi. Clifton would then tell the passenger who he was. They’d respond “No, you’re not Sweetwater.”

“I’ll say, Well, I guess I’m not then, if you say so.”

Sweetwater had reasons to be bitter but was not.

After decades of travel, he relished being back home, able to care for his ailing mother, his three children and later their children. Sometimes, he’d drive by Carter Playground, lift his overweight frame from the black seat cushion and play three-on-

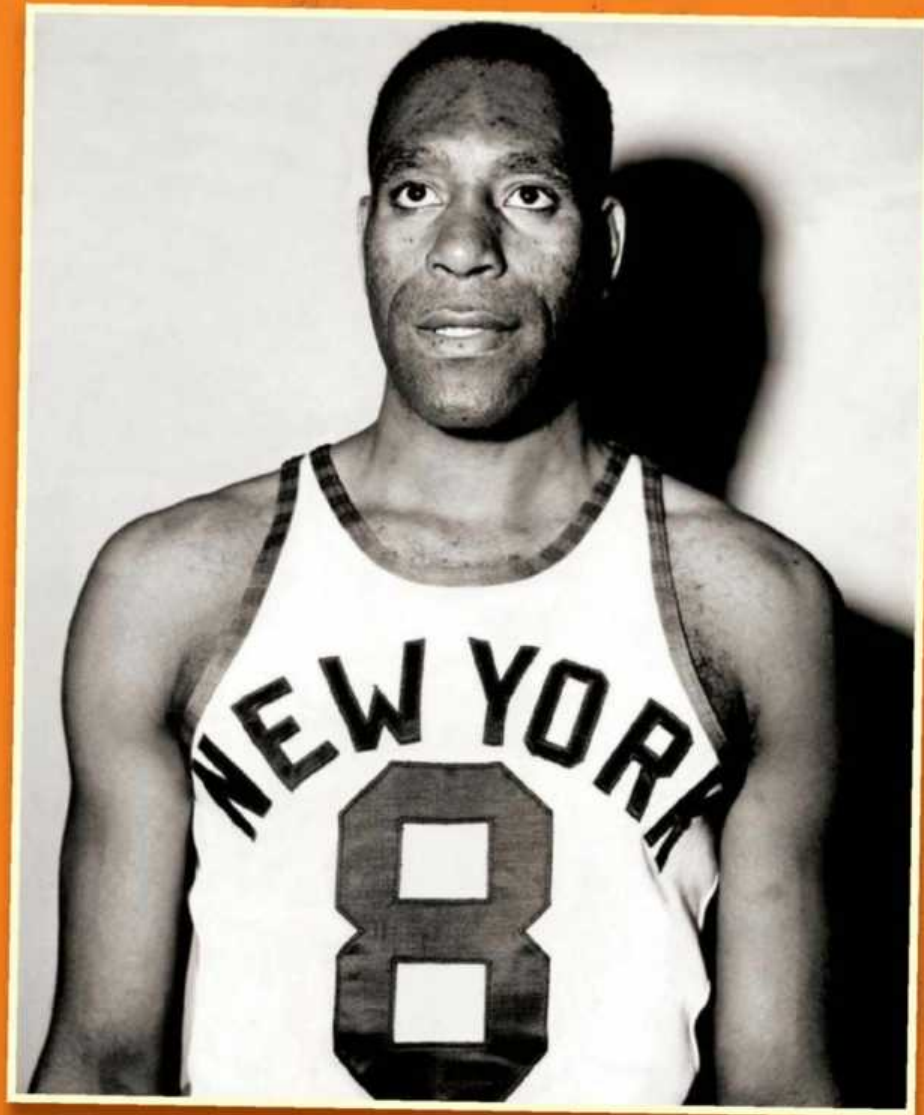
three with neighborhood kids.

Money was tight—he never made more than \$12,500 in a year of pro ball and he didn’t receive the pension that NBA players who retired after 1964 would get—but he had family, he had a community and he had a craft. “I’m the best cab driver in Chicago and if I’m not, I’m at least the fourth or fifth best,” he told the *Sun-Times* in 1988, two years before he died from a heart attack while behind the wheel.

It wasn’t a life to which today’s NBA stars aspire, but it still held vast riches. Perhaps nothing shows this better than the end of the *Once a Star* episode. Sweetwater sits on his wooden front porch, beaming at his two young grandchildren as he holds them on his knees. Soon, his daughter, his mother and a small army of neighborhood children join them.

Clifton never got what he deserved while he was alive.

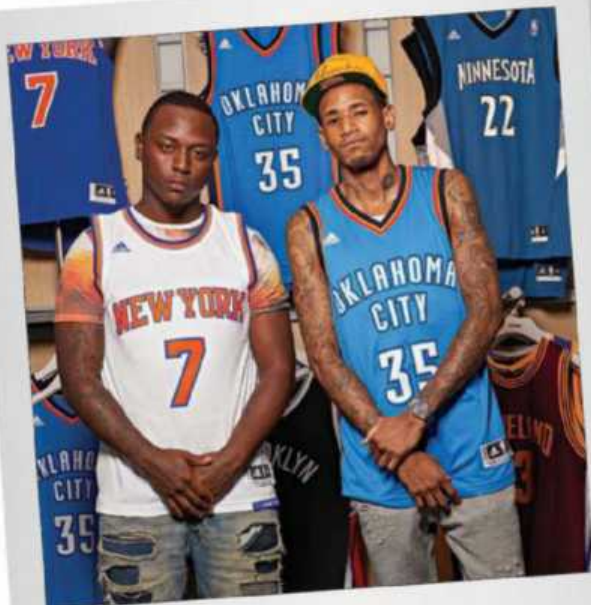
Yet he had what he wanted. **\$**



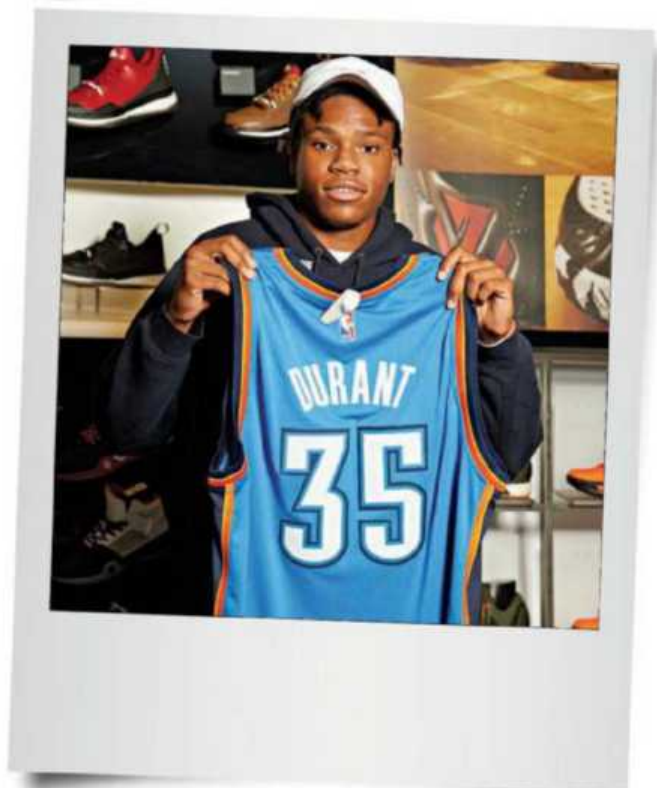
THE FAN

CHECK OUT HOW PEOPLE
REP THEIR TEAMS.
WHAT'S YOUR STYLE?

To get your own adidas
NBA gear, head to adidas.com.



Fashion trends come and go, but one thing that will never go out of style is supporting your squad. With the NBA season finally upon us, we headed to the **adidas Sport Performance Store** in New York City to see who the real fans were excited about. From local die-hard Knicks fans to plenty of people all in for reigning Champs Golden State, plus some love for Kevin Durant and OKC, and LeBron James and the Cavs, everyone could agree Opening Night couldn't get here fast enough.



KICKS OFF COURT



adidas Originals SL Loop Racer Out now, \$95



Converse CONS One Star Pro Out now, \$75



EWING 33 Hi Out now, \$120



EWING Focus Out now, \$120



Jordan 1 Mid Out now, \$110



Jordan Westbrook 0 Out now, \$130



Jordan Eclipse Holiday Out now, \$120



NikeLab Lunar Force 1 x Acronym
Out now, \$200



NikeLab Classic Cortez Out now, \$130



Reebok Ventilator SO Out now, \$80



Reebok Classic Leather INT OP Out now, \$75



Timberland Groveton High Top Out now, \$120



Under Armour SpeedForm Fortis
Out now, \$110



Under Armour Flow Grid Out now, \$80

KICKS EXTRA



NINE WEST

CLIPPERS GUARD CHRIS PAUL'S NEW SIGNATURE SNEAKER—THE CP3.IX—MAKES ITS DEBUT THIS SEASON.

Chris Paul's first sneaker with Jordan Brand was released in 2008. Since then, he's earned eight straight All-Star appearances—and eight more signature sneakers.

His latest, the Jordan CP3.IX, was officially unveiled in late September, with the "Emerald" colorway hitting stores October 1 and the shoe's global release scheduled for November 1. Paul's most technically advanced sneaker to date, the IX is built to stabilize his feet.

And since the Clippers floor general laces up a brand new pair of kicks for all 82 games and Playoffs ("Something that I took away from MJ, having conversations with him years ago," he says) the CP3.IX has an innovative lockdown lacing system and full-length internal bootie for one-to-one fit.

Paul's involvement with his signature shoe's design has grown exponentially since the CP1. "Now I look back to the 1s and I say, Man, those were some bricks! How did I play in those? How did I function?" he jokes. His main focus these days—beyond making a hot-looking shoe—is comfort for the court. "Cushioning is something that I don't really like to play with, as far as the integrity of the shoe," CP says. "If the shoe looks great but nobody wants to wear it, then what are you doing?"

The solution is a nine-chamber Zoom Air unit in the forefoot of the CP3.IX, helping Paul execute his devastating pet move: when he drives right, stops on a dime, pulls the ball back between his legs and pops a jumper. "I always tell my brother, the shoes weren't made for him." —**ABE SCHWADRON**

BOX OUT

A new company provides consumers with a monthly package of dope sneaker accessories.

Matt Turney has always been a sneakerhead. "It just felt like it was in my blood," he says. And that love for shoes led to the birth of Sneaker Box.

"It's a subscription business," Turney says, "where once a month we send out a box of sneaker accessories you can hook to shoes." Which shoes, exactly? Well, Sneaker Box constantly monitors the market to find out what's popular. Boxes are usually linked to shoes that just dropped, although some are theme-based, like the Fourth of July box with red, white and blue swag.

The boxes include items like premium laces, lace-locks, graphic socks, snapbacks, t-shirts, sneaker shields (which prevent the shoe from creasing), sneaker cleaners and more. The tagline sums these packages up pretty clearly: "Everything you need to go with your kicks."

The boxes are growing in popularity, as both guys and girls have picked up on them. Subscribers range in age from teens to adults and you can get your own memberships for \$35 a month. Head to sneakerboxco.com to start your collection.—**ALEX SQUADRON**



STATEMENT OF OWNERSHIP

As required by Title 39, Section 3685 United States Code below is the Statement of Ownership, Management, and Circulation of SLAM.

- Publication Title: SLAM
- Publication Number: 1072-525X
- Filing Date: 10/01/2015
- Issue Frequency: Monthly except January & October
- Number of Issues Published Annually: 10
- Annual Subscription Price: \$19.97
- Complete Mailing Address of Known Office of Publication: 261 Madison Ave., 8th fl., New York, NY 10016-2303
Contact Person: Brian Labrecq; Telephone: 212-915-4182
- Complete Mailing Address of Headquarters or General Business Office of Publisher: TEN: The Enthusiast Network, LLC
831 S. Douglas St.
El Segundo, CA 90245
- Full Names and Complete Mailing Addresses of Publisher, Editor, and Managing Editor: Publisher: Dennis Page, 261 Madison Avenue, 8th fl., NY, NY 10016
Editor: Ben Osborne, 261 Madison Avenue, 8th fl., NY, NY 10016
Managing Editor: Susan Price Thomas, 261 Madison Ave, 8th fl., NY, NY 10016
- Owner: TEN: The Enthusiast Network, Inc.
831 S. Douglas St. El Segundo, CA 90245
- Known Bondholders, Mortgagees, and Other Security Holders Owning or Holding 1 Percent or More of Total Amount of Bonds, Mortgages or Other Securities: ☒ None
- Tax Status: The purpose, function, and nonprofit status of this organization and the exempt status for federal income tax purposes:
☒ Has Not Changed During Preceding 12 Months
☐ Has Changed During the Preceding 12 Months
- Publication Title: SLAM
- Issue Date for Circulation Data Below: September '15
- Extent and Nature of Circulation:

	Average No. Copies Each Issue During Preceding 12 Months	No. Copies of Single Issue Published Nearest to Filing Date
a. Total Number of Copies (Net press run)	188,566	170,624
b. Paid Circulation (By Mail and Outside the Mail)		
(1) Mailed Outside-County Paid Subscriptions Stated on PS Form 3541 (include paid distribution above nominal rate, advertiser's proof copies, and exchange copies)	67,846	58,723
(2) Mailed In-County Subscriptions Stated on PS Form 3541 (include paid distribution above nominal rate, advertiser's proof copies, and exchange copies)	0	0
(3) Paid Distribution Outside the Mails Including Sales Through Dealers and Carriers, Street Vendors, Counter Sales, and Other Paid Distribution Outside USPS	20,127	22,988
(4) Paid Distribution by Other Classes of Mail Through the USPS (e.g., First-Class Mail)	0	0
c. Total Paid Distribution (Sum of 15b (1), (2), (3) and (4))	87,972	81,721
d. Free or Nominal Rate Distribution (By Mail and Outside the Mail)		
(1) Free or Nominal Rate Outside-County Copies Included on PS Form 3541	18,962	16,806
(2) Free or Nominal Rate In-County Copies Included on PS Form 3541	0	0
(3) Free or Nominal Rate Copies Mailed at Other Classes Through the USPS (e.g., First-Class Mail)	0	0
(4) Free or Nominal Rate Distribution Outside the Mail (carriers or other means)	3	0
e. Total Free or Nominal Distribution (Sum of 15d (1), (2), (3) and (4))	18,965	16,806
f. Total Distribution (Sum of 15c and 15e)	106,937	98,527
g. Copies not Distributed (See Instructions to Publishers #4 (page 3))	81,629	72,097
h. Total (Sum of 15f and 15g)	188,566	170,624
i. Percent Paid (15c divided by 15f times 100)	82.3%	82.9%

- Extent and Nature of Circulation:
- | | Average No. Copies Each Issue During Preceding 12 Months | No. Copies of Single Issue Published Nearest to Filing Date |
|---|--|---|
| a. Paid Electronic Copies | 16,631 | 29,638 |
| b. Total Paid Print Copies (Line 15c) + 104,603 | | 111,359 |
| c. Total Requested Copy Distribution (Line 15f) + Paid Electronic Copies (Line 15a) | 123,567 | 128,165 |
| d. Percent Paid (Both Print & Electronic Copies) (15b divided by 15c x 100) | 84.7% | 88.9% |
- ☒ I certify that 50% of all my distributed Copies (Electronic & Print) are paid above a nominal price.
- Publication of Statement of Ownership: ☒ If the publication is a general publication, publication of this statement is required. Will be printed in the December '14 issue of this publication.
- Signature and Title of Editor, Publisher, Business Manager, or Owner: Thomas Stator, SVP Consumer Marketing 10/01/2015

I certify that all information furnished on this form is true and complete. I understand that anyone who furnishes false or misleading information on this form or who omits material or information requested on the form may be subject to criminal sanctions (including fines and imprisonment) and/or civil sanctions (including civil penalties).

CHECK THIS

ZIP IT

When the weather dips...



adidas Originals NEO
\$95, at adidas.com



Carhartt Gilliam
\$70, at carhartt.com



Columbia Trask Mountain Turbo Down
\$150, at columbia.com



Jordan Fly
\$125, at jumpman23.com



Mitchell & Ness NBA Snap Front
\$100, at mitchellandness.com



Patagonia Bivy Down
\$179, at patagonia.com



Timberland Bolton Mountain Down
\$498, at timberland.com



Woolrich Wool Aleutian
\$295, at woolrich.com



Under Armour ColdGear Infrared Performance
\$70, at ua.com



It ain't the shoes



the wearable for athletes

It ain't the shoes...it's YOU. VERT is a small device worn on your waist. Show your hops and get all your jump stats as you play. Post why it ain't the shoes @vert #ainttheshoes

Got Hops? Prove it!

myVERT.com



PUNKS

HOW WE DO THINGS

HARRY GILES WILL ONE DAY JOIN A LONG LIST OF SUCCESSFUL NBA PLAYERS WHO SPENT TIME AT HIGH SCHOOL POWERHOUSE OAK HILL.

WORDS **FRANKLYN CALLE** ★ PORTRAITS **GEORDY PEARSON**

In the rural mountains of Mouth of Wilson, VA, where not even a GPS can save unfamiliar drivers due to the large hills intercepting satellite data, and where the only reliable cell signal is provided by US Cellular, one of basketball's most promising young talents prepares for his turn at national powerhouse Oak Hill Academy.

Harry Giles, a 6-10 power forward who some argue is the top player in the Class of 2016, transferred this past summer to the storied program—with a 20-plus NBA player alumni list that includes Carmelo Anthony, Brandon Jennings and Kevin Durant (transferred)—after three years at Wesleyan Christian Academy (NC). A native of Winston-

Salem, the 90-plus minute ride into the remote location just north of the NC-VA border was strictly a business decision, with benefits that include eliminating distractions while narrowing in on priorities.

"I just wanted to focus and lock in on school and basketball," says Giles of the move. "I wanted to be as prepared as possible for college. And I knew Oak Hill would help. It was going to help me stay focused."

From Durant to Anthony Davis and Chris Webber, the comparisons have all been auspicious. Playing in the travel grassroots circuit for CP3 All-Stars, backed and (sometimes) coached by Chris Paul himself—also a Winston-Salem native—Giles couldn't

have a better pro to lean on.

"Having Chris in your corner, the player he is, it's unreal," says the uncommitted senior, who's down to Wake Forest, UNC, Duke, Kentucky and Kansas as of press time. "We're boys, like brothers. When we kick it, it's not even about basketball; we just talk about life."

His journey has experienced its own set of steep mountains. After an impressive freshman season that saw him rise to the top of the national rankings, averaging 12.5 points and 9.5 rebounds while helping lead the Trojans to the NCISAA Class 3A state crown, Giles tore his ACL, MCL and meniscus that following summer while hooping for USAB's U16 squad at the FIBA Americas Championships.

A long rehab proceeded, missing his entire sophomore season and slowly finding his rhythm the following spring and summer with AAU.

"Coming back from injury was tough because even when I came back I was still struggling—trying to get back in shape and keep up," recalls Giles. "I kind of felt like people were going to be like, 'Oh, he's not going to be the same,' or question how I was going to be. But I accepted that. It was part of it. I learned to never take the court for granted."

Any fears that he would never fully get back on track to reach his full potential were put to rest last season, when he averaged 23.9 ppg and 12.5 rpg as a junior, leading Wesleyan to a 29-5 record and the NCISAA 3A state championship game.

Not only did he regain his swagger, he extended his game from dominant post player to face-up forward whose agility and power allow him to create while also showing he can step out and sink jumpers from as deep as the perimeter. In an age where many early hyped prospects never regain their status after bumps along the way, Giles has managed to emerge from it all untouched.

"I didn't know when it was going to happen or how it was going to happen," says Giles of whether he thought he would bounce back and retain his status among the best post-rehab. "But I just knew if I put in the work, it'd eventually happen."





*"I just wanted
to focus and lock
in on school
and basketball,
and I knew Oak
Hill would help."*

NEXT MAN UP

TYUS BATTLE

Metuchen (NJ) St. Joseph, 6-6, G

Working on the same floor where this past June's No. 1 Draft pick Karl-Anthony Towns, former Duke and Bulls guard Jay Williams and former NBA All-Star center Andrew Bynum hooped as high school seniors, Syracuse-commit Tyus Battle looks to close out his prep career this season following his transfer to St. Joseph HS this summer.

After averaging 22.5 points, 6.3 rebounds and 3.5 assists as a sophomore at Gill St. Bernard's, where he spent his first three years, the 6-6 shooting guard missed the majority of his junior year dealing with a stress fracture in his right foot before going on to miss just about his entire AAU season rehabbing.

The last time Syracuse made it to the Final Four, it featured a lineup composed of tall guards, including 2014 NBA Rookie of the Year Michael Carter-Williams. Having drawn some comparisons to the former Orangemen for his playmaking abilities at his size, Syracuse fans are hoping for similar results. But before that, the perimeter sniper, who has seen a dip in the debatable national rankings from not being on the floor much the past year, wants to make one last statement at the prep level.

"I'm not worried about rankings, but I definitely have a chip on my shoulder after not playing last year," says Battle. "I want to go out there and perform well and prove to everybody I belong out there with the best. I'll let my game back it up." —FRANKLYN CALLE



NEW PRIORITIES

MARQUES BOLDEN Dallas (TX) DeSoto, 6-10, F

We were expecting a phone call from Marques Bolden back in early October, but the scheduled time came and went without a word. It was only a day later that his athletic director at Dallas' DeSoto HS explained that our convo had been preempted by a request from a slightly more high-profile visitor. "Coach Calipari and his staff unexpectedly came to campus for a visit," we were told. "That kind of took priority."

As it turned out, we never did get to talk to Bolden, and so we're left to tell you about him ourselves. Not that that's much of a challenge: As a 6-10, 250-pounder who is (arguably) the top true center prospect in the 2016 class, Bolden gives fans, scouts, opponents and media members alike plenty to talk about. With or without the ball, he's a monster in the paint, long and athletic enough to dunk pretty much everything—and, for those same reasons, known for emphatic rejections of ill-advised shot attempts. He's not yet dragging opposing bigs out to the three-point line, but between his post game and a willingness to get up the floor in transition, he's a problem in half court or on the break.

Who he'll be causing trouble for next season remains to be seen. As we went to press, all signs pointed to Duke, Kansas and, yes, Kentucky as the most serious finalists for his signature. Whichever program wins that race might just end up with the top-ranked class in the country. Needless to say, they'll be waiting anxiously on a phone call from Bolden, too. —RYAN JONES



Battle: Charlie Chalkin; Bolden: Jon Lopez/Nike Basketball; Ionescu: USA Basketball; Norvelt: Jon Lopez/Nike Basketball; Tatum: Atiba Jefferson



BASKETBALL DIARY JAYSON TATUM

Hey, what's up y'all? Lately I've just been trying to get in shape and ready for the season. So at least six times a week I'm working out. My day starts at 6:30 a.m. and I'm going until right after school when I do weight training with my team and then we go out and do conditioning, which is either running the track or hills.

I just got back from USA Basketball junior minicamp in Colorado Springs last week. I played great and overall had a fun time. A lot of us will play against each other during the school year so we had a chance to talk a little trash.

I haven't gotten a chance to see our schedule fully but I did see that this season we open up against Oak Hill in our first game in early December. We're also traveling a lot. We're going to Springfield, MA, as well as Springfield, MO. We're also going to Chicago, West Virginia and Florida for the City of Palms Classic.

We'll be playing against a lot of the top players in the country in our out-of-town games, actually—guys like Malik Monk, Harry Giles, Miles Bridges and Alterique Gilbert.

In school I've been taking a journalism class, getting into the other side of interviews and getting a taste of what it's like to write stories. It's different.

Since my last diary, Duke has gotten two new commitments. I was really excited when I heard Frank Jackson committed. He was out there in Colorado and I got a chance to see how great a player he was, and a great person off the floor. We really jelled and I think we're going to do some great things. We also got a commitment from Javin DeLaurier. I haven't met him but I've heard great things.

Since this is the NBA Preview Issue, I'll give my predictions. Brad Beal is my guy being from St. Louis. I think he's going to have a breakout year. I can see the Wizards making it to the conference finals against the Cavs. I don't know if they'd win but I'd love to see them there. In the West, I'm taking OKC. For MVP, I got KD. Coming off last year, I think he has something to prove. And for Rookie of the Year, I'd say either Jahlil Okafor or Stanley Johnson.

#GOALS

SABRINA IONESCU Miramonte (CA) High, 5-10, F

After success last year, we wanted to know what Sabrina Ionescu planned for her senior season. "I don't think I have any goals written out," she said. "Just to have fun, compete and enjoy my last year with my coach and teammates. Then whatever happens, happens."

If her final year is anything like her previous, a lot of good basketball is waiting to happen. Last year, the 5-10 forward made a statement, posting a stellar statline: 23 ppg, 8.9 rpg, 7.3 apg and 5 spg. Not surprisingly, she set Miramonte's single-season records in each of those categories. But when asked what she considers her favorite part of basketball, Ionescu doesn't mention any of the above. Instead, she emits a simple sense of gratitude: "Just being able to play and be surrounded with people I care about [are my favorite parts]," she says. That, and the ability to compete in a sport she loves. Her love for basketball developed playing with her brother when she was a tot. Fast forward a decade and a half, and that little girl led her club team to a national title, won gold twice with USA and has a number of top colleges knocking on her door. As of press time, Ionescu hasn't picked her school, but wherever she goes is guaranteed to have a girl who'll help meet its goals. —HABEEBA HUSAIN



STUNTIN' LIKE MY DADDY

ZACK NORVELL JR Chicago (IL) Simeon, 6-5, G



Zack Norvell Jr. has been wowing big crowds since, as a 3-year-old, he'd show off his skills during New Mexico State halftimes. Norvell's father was a key player for Lou Henson's 1999 Big West champs, known for his stifling defense and scoring with the game on the line.

These days, Zack Jr. scores all the time. He dropped 53 in a crucial game in Las Vegas last summer—in front of ecstatic assistant coach Jabari Parker.

Norvell is now preparing to

reclaim the fame for Simeon, and as arguably the best senior guard in the area, he's well positioned to do so.

Norvell averaged just over 14 ppg last year, while the Wolverines were 28-4—but didn't win the city or state title. With the graduation of Ed Morrow (now at Nebraska), look for the ambidextrous lefty's average to soar. He won't do it alone, getting help from two guys whose fathers were also fine players: 6-7 Ben Coupet, and one of the nation's best

young PGs, 6-2 sophomore Kezo Brown.

Zack Sr., now an assistant coach at rival DuSable, says, "My son always dreamed of doing what I did, except he wanted to do it better. He's bigger, a better shooter and so versatile. He gets work done with either hand."

That versatility also helps with the son's interesting hobby: carpentry. His wood-working output is remarkably clean, smooth, fresh and efficient—like his jumpshot. —RUS BRADBURY

SLAM (ISSN:1072-625X) December 2015, Vol. 22, No. 10 is published monthly except January and October by TEN: The Enthusiast Network, LLC, 261 Madison Avenue, 6th floor, New York, NY 10016-2303. Copyright © 2015 by TEN: The Enthusiast Network Magazines, LLC. All rights reserved. Periodicals postage is paid at New York, NY, and additional mailing offices. Single copy price is \$4.99. Subscriptions: Subscription rates for one year (10 issues) U.S., APO, FPO and U.S. Possessions is \$19.97. Canadian orders add \$10.00 per year, all other countries add \$20.00 per year (for surface mail postage). Payment in advance, U.S. funds only. For subscription, address changes and adjustments, write to SLAM, P.O. Box 420235, Palm Coast, FL 32142-0235. SLAM is a registered trademark of TEN: The Enthusiast Network Magazines, LLC. Reproduction without permission is prohibited. Manuscripts, photos, and other materials submitted must be accompanied by a stamped, self-addressed envelope; SLAM assumes no responsibility for unsolicited material. Printed in U.S.A. Postmaster: Send all UAA to CFS. (See DMM 7074.12.5); NON-POSTAL AND MILITARY FACILITIES: send address corrections to SLAM, P.O. Box 420235, Palm Coast, FL 32142-0235.

FROZEN MOMENT

YOU GUYS AGAIN?

*Anderson Varejao,
Tim Duncan
and LeBron James,
June 12, 2007*

In a League where rosters turn over almost as fast as Tony Wroten turns it over, it's pretty remarkable that our 2016 Finals prediction features three guys who, should it happen, can celebrate a little reunion from '07. And yes, we know there's an asterisk attached to our friend at right.



WEAR THE YEAR THEY WON IT ALL

Almanac
BRAND

"RELIVING HISTORY. ONE THREAD AT A TIME."

WWW.THEALMANACBRAND.COM



#TITLESERIES



NEW YORK



THE BAY



PORTLAND



SEATTLE



PHILLY



BOSTON



LOS ANGELES



DETROIT



CHICAGO



LOS ANGELES



MIAMI



SAN ANTONIO

WWW.THEALMANACBRAND.COM

The Eastbay logo is rendered in a stylized, yellow, cursive font with a white outline. It is positioned in the upper left corner of the image. The background of the entire advertisement is a dark, grainy photograph of a crowd of people, likely at a sporting event. A woman with long dark hair is prominent in the center, looking towards the camera. To her right, a man's arm and shoulder are visible. In the bottom left, a portion of a wicker chair is seen.

Eastbay

NO DISTRACTIONS NO EXCUSES

Every day there are a thousand little things trying to pull you off your game. Every distraction you give in to is one less drill you can run or practice shot you can take. Eastbay athletes don't give in to them.

**GET THE BEST TO BE YOUR BEST
AT EASTBAY.COM.**



WATCH THE TRAIN PAST DISTRACTIONS VIDEO.





HIDE

NEVER

STAND OUT IN THE J WALL 2

